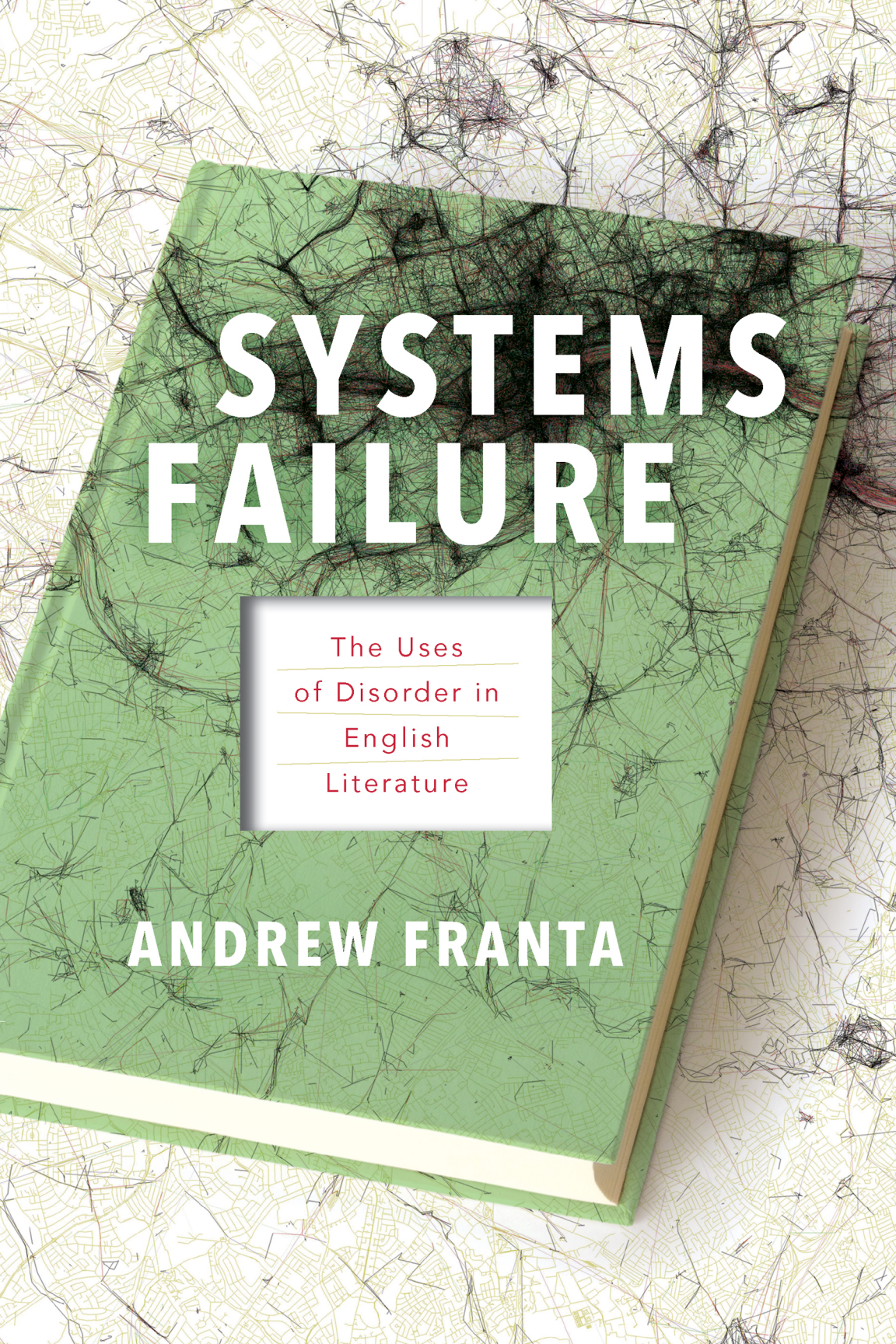
SYSTEMS FAILURE
The Uses of Disorder in English Literature
ANDREW FRANTA

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SYSTEMS FAILURE

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SYSTEMS FAILURE

The Uses of Disorder in English Literature

Andrew Franta

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For Stacey

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SYSTEMS FAILURE

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Introduction

Unconscionable Maps

> In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirely of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.
>
> Suárez Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes*,
> Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658
>
> —Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science"

"On Exactitude in Science" is a parable about the desire for order and its discontents. In a pair of balanced and counterpoised movements, Borges's story captures the relentlessness of the pursuit of knowledge—the drive to master the natural world through the creation and application of abstract systems—and also its futility. Its first movement, in which "the Art of Cartography" is perfected, leads seamlessly to the second, in which it is undone.[1] But the real force of the story is that the making of the map is, in fact, its unmaking. "The following Generations" do not abandon the map only because they "were not so fond of" cartography; they also recognize that it

has been rendered "Useless" by the very aspiration that produced it.[2] Greater accuracy and detail lead to larger and larger maps (a point ironically underscored by the story's extreme brevity). Borges was perhaps inspired by a scene in Lewis Carroll's last novel, *Sylvia and Bruno Concluded* (1893), which also features a map as large as the territory it represents. In Carroll's novel, a character named Mein Herr boasts about the creation of "a map to the country, on the scale of *a mile to the mile*!" Asked whether this grand map has been of much use, he admits, "It has never been spread out, yet, . . . the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight. So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well!"[3] As this cheerfully absurd conclusion makes clear, a map of a country that is the size of the country is, finally, no map at all. Ultimately, the concept of scale becomes meaningless. Exactitude undermines representation.

It is my argument in this book that while we tend to regard skepticism about systems as postmodern, stories about the drive to order the world and its inevitable unravelling like those told by Borges and Carroll have their roots in the eighteenth century. *Tristram Shandy* exemplifies this point of origin. Laurence Sterne takes up problems of mapping and scale that reappear in modern and postmodern narratives—and does so in a way that serves as an emblem of the inevitable frustration of the long eighteenth century's pursuit of systems. Narratives about systems failure from Samuel Johnson and Sterne to Jane Austen and Thomas De Quincey challenge a familiar story about the Enlightenment, which has long been understood—and often regarded itself—as an age of order. The basis for this understanding is clear: advancements in philosophy and the natural sciences; the development of statistics and political economy; and the publication of Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* (1751–72), the tenth edition of Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae* (1758), and Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) all testify to the idea of a world not only explicable but reducible to system. In his *Elements of Philosophy* (1759), d'Alembert described "the present state of . . . knowledge" in precisely these terms, claiming that "the true system of the world has been recognized, developed, and perfected," but he was also careful to distinguish between the systematic pursuit of knowledge and what he called "the taste for systems."[4] "The spirit of systems," d'Alembert wrote in his *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot* (1751), "is in physics what metaphysics is in geometry."[5] What the

Encyclopédie proposed was not new systems, but, in Diderot's words, "changing the common mode of thinking."[6] In *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, published in 1932, Ernst Cassirer reformulated and refined the *encyclopédistes*' distinction between metaphysics and new ways of thinking for twentieth-century intellectual history by defining Enlightenment philosophy in terms of the opposition between the "spirit of systems" and the new age's "systematic spirit."[7] Enlightenment thinkers, Cassirer argued, left behind "a systematic doctrinal structure" and an outmoded belief in hypothetical systems to pursue a systematic inquiry into "the fundamental form of reality, the form of all natural and spiritual being."[8]

While many scholars have contested Cassirer's evaluation of Enlightenment thought—beginning with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in 1944—few have questioned the ascendancy of system during the eighteenth century. Important recent studies have reexamined the Enlightenment from the standpoint of a range of system-building projects, and Clifford Siskin has identified system "as the primary form of Enlightenment and the norm for modern knowledge."[9] Siskin also points out, however, that even today our attitudes toward system remain deeply antithetical; as he puts it, "We do not hesitate to 'blame the system,' as that which . . . works both too well—'you can't beat "The System" '—and not well enough—it always seems to break down."[10] This ambivalence is an intrinsic feature of the emergence of systems; it is particularly striking in relation to the idea that society is a system or is made up of systems within systems. Skepticism about the application of systems thinking to social organization is evident in such works as Daniel Defoe's *An Essay upon Projects* (1697), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and *A Modest Proposal* (1729), and in Victor Frankenstein's remark on "the herd of common projectors" in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).[11] In fact, much of the long eighteenth century's imaginative literature suggests that the Enlightenment and its legacy are just as strongly marked by a fascination with failure and an obsession with social forces that are seemingly irreducible to system. In this book, I offer an altered perspective on the Enlightenment drive to order and, in tracking literary responses to the period's conceptions of social systems, disclose a trajectory of literary-historical development in the long eighteenth century that diverges from the influential and familiar story of the rise of the novel. I make the broad contention that, to appreciate the power of systems, we must pay attention to how often they fail—and how many of them are

created for the express purpose of failure.[12] One of my specific arguments is that paying attention to failure reveals that, alongside the work of social representation described by Ian Watt and revised and refined by Michael McKeon, Nancy Armstrong, and Catherine Gallagher, among many others, the novel was also a vehicle for thinking about how the social world resists attempts to explain or comprehend it.[13] Society, the writers examined here discover, is not like biology or political economy; when systemic analysis is brought to bear on social relations, what we discover is not a deeper order but rather a realm in which apparent order is perpetually disrupted and broken down and in which attempts to identify or impose systems are subject to the vagaries of chance and accident.

This episode in the literary history of the long eighteenth century troubles our persistent tendency to equate the pursuit of knowledge with the development of systems. I argue that a significant tradition in English literature—a line that includes Johnson, Sterne, Tobias Smollett, William Godwin, Austen, and De Quincey—could make sense of society only by rejecting this conflation.[14] In the century preceding the emergence of modern sociology, these authors tell distinctly modern stories about the propensity of social life to escape the schemes intended to explain or contain it and transform these failures into heuristics for analyzing the elusiveness of social relations. The social, they suggest (anticipating Bruno Latour and other contemporary theorists), is not a product but a process. As Sterne puts it in *A Sentimental Journey*, the true subject of the novel is not society but "the progress of sociality."[15] The story from *Tristram Shandy* that will serve as this introduction's example of systems failure distills to its essence a cultural narrative that, as the rest of the book will demonstrate, is more often defined by its bewildering complexity. On the bowling green at the bottom of Toby Shandy's kitchen garden—at a remove from the social reality that seems to be the novel form's inevitable referent—Sterne describes an experiment in system building that allegorizes the failure of the drive to order. Toby's desire is, in a sense, shared by Sterne and the other authors who are the subject of this book. It is also, paradoxically, a dream that at once inspires and undermines the long eighteenth century's attempts to imagine society as a system.

At the beginning of the second book of *Tristram Shandy*, Tristram tells us that he has started a new book "on purpose that I might have room enough to explain the nature of the perplexities in which my uncle Toby was in-

volved, from the many discourses and interrogations about the siege of Namur, where he received his wound."[16] The source of Toby's problem is his wound, but his suffering is caused less by the original injury than by the complications that arise when he tries to explain how and where he got it. Toby's "perplexities," Tristram says, "arose out of the almost insurmountable difficulties he found in telling his story intelligibly" (2.1.74). If the initial joke is that Toby misunderstands questions about where he was injured—mistaking a bodily location for a geographical one—it quickly proliferates into the ongoing comedy of his obsessions. The "insurmountable difficulties" Toby encounters have to do with the complexity of the siege fortifications at Namur, which not only formed an obstacle to the attacking English and Dutch forces but continue to stand in the way of his ability "to make his company fully comprehend where he was and what he was about" (2.1.74).[17]

In fact, Toby's task proves so difficult that the attempt to recount what happened to him becomes intertwined with the battle he's describing: "In the attack of the counterscarp before the gates of St Nicholas, extending itself from the bank of the Maes, quite up to the great water-stop;—the ground was cut and cross-cut with such a multitude of dykes, drain, rivulets, and sluices, on all sides,—and he would get so badly bewildered, and set fast amongst them, that frequently he could get neither backwards or forwards to save his life; and was oft-times obliged to give up the attack upon that very account only" (2.1.74). Toby wants to identify the location where he received his wound, but his discourse is unequal to the task; the effort of precise description is itself transformed into an attack on a fortified position over terrain that is intricately cross-cut with waterworks.[18] This inability to "[tell] his story intelligibly" leaves Toby figuratively mired in the landscape he is trying to describe: he is unable to "retreat out of the ravelin without getting into the half-moon, or get out of the covered way without falling down the counterscarp, or cross the dyke without danger of slipping down inwardly" (2.1.74). The result is the exacerbation of his wound, as "these little and hourly vexations" express themselves on his body (2.1.74).

In desperation, Toby turns to a different medium.[19] Frustrated by his attempts to narrate his experience, it occurs to him that "if he could purchase such a thing, and have it pasted down upon a board, as a large map of the fortifications of the town and citadel of Namur, with its environs, it might be a means of giving him ease. . . . He was pretty confident he could

stick a pin upon the identical spot of ground where he was standing when the stone struck him" (2.1.75). Just as Tristram begins a new book of his life story "on purpose that [he] might have room enough to" tell Toby's story, Toby makes recourse to mapping in order to find a firmer ground for his recollection. Like the spatialization of narrative, the map is intended to address "the unsteady use of words which have perplexed the clearest and most exalted understandings" (2.2.78). Toby's "life was put in jeopardy by words" (2.2.78); the map promises to aid "his recovery" (2.3.79). And it does give him ease, but not in the way he envisions. Instead, the map of Namur becomes his new obsession; it causes him to "forget himself, his wound, his confinement, his dinner" (2.3.80). As Tristram puts it, "The desire of knowledge, like the thirst of riches, increases ever with the acquisition of it. The more my uncle Toby pored over his map, the more he took a liking to it" (2.3.79). The more he takes a liking to it, the more maps he acquires. Toby's obsession with the map of Namur prompts him to study the plans of nearly every fortified town in Italy and Flanders, and, after a year with his maps, he spends another year studying treatises on fortification and yet another studying ballistics.

In reconstructing the path of the cannonball that was responsible for his injury, Toby's inquiry diverges from "the notion of a right line" (2.3.80). As soon as he learns "which road the cannon-ball did not go, . . . he was insensibly led on, and resolved in his mind to enquire and find out which road the ball did go" (2.3.80). Calculating the cannonball's real trajectory leads Toby deeper and deeper into the study of geometry. He begins with Tartaglia (who, Tristram remarks, "proved to my uncle Toby to be an impossible thing"), then proceeds to "old Maltus, . . . Galileo and Torricellius, wherein, by certain geometrical rules, infallibly laid down, he found the precise path to the PARABOLA—or else a HYPERBOLA," which leads him in turn to such a welter of geometrical terms—"the parameter, or *latus rectum*, of the conic section," "the quantity and amplitude in a direct *ratio*," "the sine of double the angle of incidence"—that Tristram finally exclaims:

> —Stop! My dear uncle Toby,—stop!—go not one foot further into this thorny and bewildered track,—intricate are the steps! intricate are the mases of the labyrinth! intricate are the troubles which the pursuit of this bewitching phantom, KNOWLEDGE, will bring upon thee.
>
> (2.3.80)

On the surface, Tristram's exasperation is another joke at Toby's expense: he will never master the science he studies. In a more powerful sense, however, the passage speaks less to the particular limitations of Toby's intellect than to the very real limits to our ability to reconstruct (or predict) the consequences of the seemingly straightforward actions and interactions of material bodies.[20] The real problem, it turns out, is that the questions Toby asks—about the effects of force and motion on inanimate objects in closed systems—are exceedingly difficult to answer.[21]

In a 1978 paper on regular and irregular motion in nonlinear mechanics, the English physicist Michael Berry offered a glimpse of the complexity of the kind of calculations Toby undertakes. Berry's example is a game of billiards, and he begins by observing that the effect of the first collision of balls is relatively easy to calculate. Calculating the result of the second impact is still possible, but it requires much more precise information about initial conditions. By the ninth collision, however, the gravitational force of all of the people standing around the table must be taken into account. And, at the fifty-sixth impact, Berry calculates that, to predict the end position of the balls, you would first have to know the exact position of every particle in the universe. In *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, Nassim Taleb observes that Berry's "billiard-ball story assumes a plain and simple world; it does not even take into account these crazy social matters possibly endowed with free will."[22] Looking back to the eighteenth century, we find that many commentators anticipated the complication Taleb notes.[23] For example, in 1796 Joseph de Maistre responded to the materialism of the French revolutionaries by arguing, "If one imagines a watch all of whose springs continually vary in power, weight, dimension, form, and position, and which nevertheless invariably shows the right time, one can get some idea of the action of free beings in relation to the plans of the Creator."[24] Taken together, these examples make it clear that knowledge is a "bewitching phantom" not merely because it leads us into error, but because it is sometimes in effect "an impossible thing" (2.3.80).

Toby's trouble with ballistics prompts another change in the course of his studies. After "perceiving that the parameter and semi-parameter of the conic section, angered his wound," he leaves "off the study of projectiles in a kind of a huff" (2.4.81), and, upon learning that his wound is nearly healed, he moves from his brother's house in London to his own country house. It is there, on the bowling green, that Toby directs his man Trim in the con-

struction of ever-more-elaborate models of siege fortifications. The move from maps to models is motivated by a desire for greater accuracy and precision; as Trim says, "These ravelins, bastions, curtins, and horn-works, made but a poor, contemptible, fiddle faddle piece of work of it here upon paper" (2.5.85). The models they construct on the bowling green seek to improve on Toby's plans by recreating the sieges at Namur and other fortified towns in Italy and Flanders in three dimensions. In working to put his finger on the spot where he was injured, however, Toby expands the range and dimension of his field of study, and his search becomes less a therapeutic exercise than a spiraling, quixotic quest.

The failure of language prompts Toby's obsession with maps, and he replaces maps with models when two-dimensional representation fails to answer his purposes. This second failure crystallizes in the event that in fact precipitates his "sudden demigration" (2.5.83):

> The table in my uncle Toby's room, and at which, the night before this change happened, he was sitting with his maps, &c. about him,—being somewhat of the smallest, for that infinity of great and small instruments of knowledge which usually lay crowded upon it;—he had the accident, in reaching over for his tobacco-box, to throw down his compasses, and in stooping to take the compasses up, with his sleeve he threw down his case of instruments and snuffers;—to catch the snuffers in falling,—he thrust Monsieur Blondel off the table and Count de Pagan o' top of him.
>
> (2.5.83–84)

This accident serves two purposes. On the one hand, it dramatizes the epistemological problem that will capture the imaginations of Borges and Carroll. Like their fictional maps, Toby's inquiry has grown too big; it has overwhelmed the ground required to sustain it. On the other hand, like "This Is the House That Jack Built," Tristram's description of the accident takes the form of a cumulative tale that emphasizes the connectedness of things and thus prefigures the analytical logic of the model fortifications that Toby and Trim will go on to build and the reenactments of campaigns they will undertake on the bowling green. The chance connections between objects as the table topples over—tobacco box to compasses, compasses to instruments and snuffers, snuffers to treatises on military fortification—parody the kind of actions and interactions Toby is determined to describe. If three-dimensional modeling seems to promise greater accuracy than two-dimensional mapping,

Toby's accident intimates that it might offer only a more comprehensive accounting of the intractability of the problem that both are designed to address. In this sense, Toby and Trim's work on the bowling green is animated by the same self-defeating ambition that produces the life-size maps that Borges and Carroll describe. But while Sterne's parody of the drive for knowledge shares something of the pathos of Borges's story, it lacks the same sense of despair. And if, like Carroll, Sterne is joking, his humor is meditative rather than facetious. Toby's reenactments satirize the rage for order, but they also imagine a way of living with the inevitability of failure—or perhaps offer an image of life itself as a good-natured negotiation with failure. The contrast with Borges is especially sharp: the predicament that "On Exactitude in Science" treats as tragedy, in *Tristram Shandy* becomes play.

The work on the bowling green doesn't finally enable Toby to tell his story intelligibly. Instead, his hobbyhorse is a distraction; it allows him to forget his trauma for a time. As Tristram puts it, building fortifications and recreating the sieges of the War of the Spanish Succession in his kitchen garden "freed him from a world of sad explanations" (2.1.75). Toby's freedom is predicated on his withdrawal from the world; what begins as a search for knowledge becomes an autotelic activity. Toby and Trim's reenactments are tethered to reality but also oddly disconnected from the world. At the beginning, the correspondence between model and map is indexical.[25] They fashion their fortifications out of the soil in the kitchen garden; "FATE" and "NATURE" have furnished the ground "with just so *much* clay in it, as to retain the forms of angles and indentings,—and so *little* of it too, as not to cling to the spade, and render works of so much glory, nasty in foul weather" (6.21.400). Toby's procedure is "to take the plan" of a besieged town and, transferring the lines from paper to garden plot "by means of a large role of packthread, and a number of small piquets driven into the ground," to "enlarge it upon a scale to the exact size of his bowling-green" (6.21.400). Eventually, the fortifications incorporate durable props—"four handsome drawbridges," "a couple of gates with portcullises," and a sentry box (6.22.402)—and an ingeniously modular model town—"a perfect Proteus," which becomes "Landen, and Trerebach, and Santvliet, and Drusen, and Hagenau" (6.23.404)—made up of houses that Toby and Trim can "hook on, or off, so as to form into the plan of whatever town they pleased" (6.23.404). In one sense a technological development—rather than building scale models in clay, they create a reusable, multipurpose building set—the transformation of Toby and

Trim's method marks a shift in the purpose of their reenactments. The transposition of siege map to garden plot privileges Borgesian "exactitude"; the manipulation of scale models is an elaborate game. The news reports that serve as their plans are merely prompts, and the battles Toby and Trim reenact are not those in which they fought but episodes in a conflict they know only through the newspaper.[26] The happiness they derive from their game is the pleasure of play, and, like the looks of "honest triumph" and "intense pleasure" on Toby's face (6.22.402), it is the product of a mastery that the real world does not afford.

For Toby and Trim, reenactment becomes an end in itself. Together, they construct a world on the bowling green that, if it does not tame chance, at least transforms it into play. The errancy of war, registered in Toby's wound, is subdued by repetition; reenactment subordinates the unpredictable unfolding of time to the plans that arrive, in regular installments, in the post. Toby's project begins as an attempt to make sense of his traumatic experience; what remains at the end is the drive itself, shorn of its object. His initial motivation may be "the desire of knowledge" (2.3.79), but his reenactments are the product of a desire that has been purified of a determined purpose. Sterne's account of the progress of Toby and Trim's schemes, the more arcane details the better, creates for us the same sense of immersive distraction that the project does for them. Their reenactments signify most powerfully as an attempt to imagine work—or play—without end, and their shared sense of purpose seems all the more real when we realize that it has left behind the idea that it serves any other end. In fact, the further the war games move away from their ostensible goal of aiding Toby's recovery, the more joy they seem to bring. As Toby puts in in the "apologetical oration" in which he defends his fascination with war, "The pleasure I have taken in these things,—and that infinite delight, in particular, which has attended my sieges in the bowling green, has arose within me, and I hope in the corporal too, from the consciousness we both had, that in carrying them on, we were answering the great ends of our creation" (6.32.416). When Toby refers to "the great ends of our creation," he does not have only himself and Trim in mind; the purpose to which he refers is not instrumental but rather broadly human. It is the same drive that motivates Sir Walter's system building and Tristram's attempt to write his life. A hobbyhorse, in short, is not a means to an end, but an open-ended activity that makes use of whatever materials happen to be at hand.

What is truly radical about Sterne's account of the experiment on the bowling green comes into sharper focus when we compare it to contemporary fictions of reenactment such as Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005) and Charlie Kaufman's *Synecdoche, New York* (2008). In McCarthy's novel, the unnamed protagonist turns to reenactment to stitch together meaningful experience out of the fragmentary memories of his life before "something falling from the sky"—"technology. Parts, bits"—struck him on the head, leaving behind a "traumatized mind."[27] In Kaufman's film, Caden Cotard, a theater director reeling in the wake of an unexplained illness and the failure of his marriage (as well as a minor head injury), directs a sprawling theatrical production; he builds a scale replica of New York in a giant warehouse in Manhattan and employs a huge cast to reenact scenes from his life. Consuming itself as its scale expands, the quixotic production comes to include itself as a subject.[28] For both McCarthy and Kaufman, trauma fragments. The principals of *Remainder* and *Synecdoche, New York*—broken by injury and illness and disconnected from their own lives and the world around them—pursue the wholeness of authentic experience. Their misery reflects their alienation, and their tragedies testify to their failure to achieve the reconnection they desire. *Tristram Shandy*'s reenactments begin where McCarthy and Kaufman begin, but Sterne leaves the impossible promise of recovery behind. Instead of sticking with the doomed desire for wholeness of McCarthy's and Kaufman's postmodern protagonists, who aim to repair their worlds but only make themselves more miserable, Toby and Trim's activity is finally most compelling when it breaks free from its ostensible purpose—not in order to expand its scope, as in the spiraling complications of *Synecdoche, New York*, or to become more "real," as in the violent conclusion of *Remainder*, but, in untethering itself from reality, to become more itself.

The Peace of Utrecht puts an abrupt end to Toby's pursuit of "infinite delight." This loss denotes a return to reality, with all of its challenges and frustrations—first in the form of peace and then of romance. Without war, there are no war games, and the Widow Wadman's siege on Toby's heart takes their place, effecting his forcible reentry into the social world.[29] He laments the end of the war—"To the end of his life, he could never hear *Utrecht* mentioned upon any account whatever,—so much as read an article of news extracted out of the *Utrecht Gazette*, without fetching a sigh, as if his heart would break in twain"—because, as Sir Walter recognizes, it means "the loss of his *hobby-horse*" (6.31.412). Translated into the terms of late eighteenth-

century aesthetic theory, the end of the war marks Toby's descent from the purposiveness without purpose of Kantian aesthetics to the social context of Burke's account of the beautiful.[30] Toby's gentle good nature and devotion to Trim perhaps obscure the fact that war is, after all, antisocial. Their reenactments of sieges on the bowling green are twice removed from social reality—occurring at a distance from both the events described in the newspaper and the mundane everyday occurrences that signify, for Toby at least, only when they remind him of war (as, for example, when Sir Walter's contorted movements as he removes his wig with one hand while reaching across his body into his jacket pocket with the other recalls for Toby the angle of approach of the troops at Namur). Like Walter Shandy's system building and Tristram's life writing, Toby's hobbyhorse is a retreat from the muddle of social relations. The failure of Toby's courtship of the Widow Wadman is a reminder that sexuality is not simply "natural" but rather also part of a social system and that the rejections the failure of romance represents—of women, of marriage, of adult sexuality—are systems failures, too.

This book takes up where *Tristram Shandy* leaves off. Its focus is the recurrent attempt in literature of the long eighteenth century to understand society as a system, or a system of systems, and it traces the diverse ways in which these efforts run aground. The basic requirements of narrative—character, setting, action, interaction—involve writers in managing imagined worlds, and this practice makes literature into something like a natural staging ground for experiments in social engineering. The following chapters examine responses to various schemes of social organization in a range of literary works, from Johnson's tracking of urban encounters in the *Life of Savage* and Sterne's anatomization of interpersonal relationships in *A Sentimental Journey* to Austen's marriage plots and De Quincey's essays on the circulation of the mail and the contemplation of the cosmos. I am interested throughout in how writers take up civil and cultural institutions designed to rationalize society (cities, maps, transportation and postal systems, commercial society and the market economy, courtship and marriage, sentimental exchanges, political parties) only to complicate them, stretching their organizational and explanatory resources until they unravel. In this unraveling, literature arrives at its most penetrating insights about the structure of social life. Narrative becomes a tool for critique and a form in which aspects of the social world that elude systematic representation can be figured;

these texts thus compose a tradition that runs alongside but contests our received ideas about the rise of the novel. If the main line of the novel concerns itself with the individual's place in society, the authors considered here are interested in the conception of society that makes this kind of placement possible. I argue that this tradition gives us an unfamiliar account of literature's contribution to the study of social order, disorder, and change in the long eighteenth century—one that has less to do with the novelistic representation of social reality than the literary analysis of the idea that society has a structure.

I have mentioned that this new attentiveness to social structure has important implications for how we understand the history of the novel, and I should say more about what this means. First of all, as the subjects of the first and last chapters suggest, it means a history of the novel that comprises more than novels. The reasons for this are partly practical and specific to this book: Johnson's life writing offers a particularly vivid example of issues taken up by novelists from Sterne to Austen; De Quincey's writings about systems push the abstraction of the novelists' approaches to social form to its limits. Writing a history of the novel that is not limited to the novel is also partly polemical: we would never imagine nonliterary discourses to be irrelevant to literary-historical argument, yet our arguments about particular genres often assume a degree of generic specificity that defies what we know about how literary history works. But the most powerful reason this study does not focus solely on novels is that, while the story it tells is one in which the novel at a crucial stage of its development plays an important role, its story is not about that development. Instead, the novels that figure in this history form something of a countertradition to the emerging realist novel. They treat characters less in terms of an increasingly complex interiority than a kind of tactical utility. Questions about what people think and feel give way to an interest in how they are positioned in a range of groups, classes, crowds, and routes; authors examine sociality by treating their characters abstractly, in terms of connections that can be diagrammed rather than relationships that must be understood. This strange and even retrograde "flatness" has often been regarded by critics as a failure of characterization, but I argue that it is instead the mark of an unexpectedly sophisticated, nuanced, and skeptical response to problems of order and mastery. Many commentators, for example, have observed that Smollett's handling of epistolarity in *Humphry Clinker* fails to develop the kind of psychological

insight that characterized Samuel Richardson's use of the form. Few have recognized how Smollett's letters approach character from the outside in, framing actions and acts of communication in terms of the systems that underwrite the novel's correspondence. In *Humphry Clinker*, epistolary form becomes a way of thinking about what it would mean to conceptualize society as a network, and characters are conceived as objects plotted in narrative space rather than fully realized subjects.

From the standpoint of histories of the novel that regard the genre's development as a steady march toward psychological realism, this conception of narrative form has been difficult to understand. It appears alternately primitive and unrefined (as in the flat characters and stock generic conventions of Smollett and Godwin), self-consciously sophisticated and ironic (Sterne and Austen), or simply irrelevant to novelistic representation (Johnson and De Quincey). But it is in their departures from the nascent realism of the novel that these works constitute an essential line in the development of modern narrative and social theory. In diverging from novelistic probability, these texts deploy a narrative analytic designed to explore the lines of force that organize individuals into a social world. They scrutinize actions and arrangements that appear to conform to pattern and scheme but in fact fail to capture the social relations they claim to map. In their attention to social structure and their abstraction, these narratives share a common impulse with late eighteenth-century statistics or network theory today. Unlike these social scientific methods, however, the literary works that make up this tradition take the limitations of systematic analysis and the inevitable failure of mastery as their governing premise. The schemes they envision are doomed to fall short of their aims. The commitment to falling short of full comprehension points to how the narrative positioning and repositioning of characters becomes a way not merely of negotiating a changed reality but of understanding an ordering and reordering of social life that is never simply coextensive with the systems designed to tame it.

Chapter 1, "Life without Theory in the *Life of Savage*," argues that Samuel Johnson makes the problem of knowledge central to modern life writing, and that he does so by articulating a question about the relationship between pattern and circumstance that shapes the novel as well. In telling the story of his troubled friend's life, Johnson suggests that the problem the biographer faces is not merely that his regard for his subject might get in the way of what he owes "to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth" (as he claims in *Ram-*

bler 60), but that to write a life is necessarily to run the risk of distorting it.[31] Johnson works to capture the chaos of Richard Savage's existence, but the mere fact of writing a life gives it a shape, and the failure to represent contingency discloses the difficulty of separating biography from fiction. The biographer's problem is a problem for all writers—and one that holds a central place in the development of the tradition that is the subject of this book.

In chapter 2, "Sterne and the Uses of Disorder," I argue that for Laurence Sterne the biographer's problem becomes an engine for the production of fiction. While Johnson discovered the impossibility of writing disorder in the *Life of Savage*, Sterne's novels take the rage for order, and its inevitable frustration, as their central theme. *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* each trace their characters' never-ending efforts to understand and analyze their lives and, increasingly, their social relationships, but they do so only to dramatize, and ironize, the repeated failures of their efforts. Failure in Sterne is transformed into an ordering principle; it becomes a means of gesturing toward the contingency that narrative cannot represent. If Johnson's problem is that he can't stop making sense, Sterne's problem is that his characters can't escape the contingencies and circumstances that rule their lives. For Johnson, the failure of biography is the triumph of realism over real life; for Sterne, the power of the novel is its exposure of realism's fractured character.

Since their initial publication, Tobias Smollett's novels have been understood as attempts to represent eighteenth-century social life in all its variety. Their flat characters, episodic plots, and elevation of satire and romance above realism have been regarded as evidence of Smollett's failure as a novelist. In chapter 3, "From Map to Network in *Humphry Clinker*," I reject this view, arguing that the novel's schematic treatment of characters and situations reflects a deep skepticism about picturing society as the aggregate of its members' experiences. *Humphry Clinker* does not so much represent the social world as explore what it means to understand society as a network of relationships. In plotting his picaresque narrative on a map and casting it in epistolary form, Smollett contests the idea of the novel as a demographic account and registers the emergence of a systemic view of society disclosed by networks of transportation and communication.

Chapter 4, "Godwin's Handshake," argues that William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* turns on the failure of a familiar gesture—the handshake—to contest both radical and conservative responses to the French Revolution. In-

stead of merely fictionalizing the arguments of his *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, as many critics have argued, Godwin's representation of the repeated failure of a socially and politically significant gesture to organize and articulate social and political obligations identifies a rupture in the contemporary theory and practice of political representation. Godwin's handshake thus points to a historical development—the emergence of commercial society—which undermines the conception of politics that underwrites the world it depicts.

In chapter 5, "Jane Austen and the Morphology of the Marriage Plot," I argue that, in Austen's novels, characters' actions and interactions—their relationships with one another and also with the spaces in which they are positioned and through which they move—are as important as their imagined thoughts and feelings. Moreover, Austen's realism—her detailed representation of everyday life—is best understood not in opposition to plot, as most commentators have, but as an intensification of narrative structure. For Austen, the marriage plot is not simply a category of novelistic narrative or merely one theme among many. Instead, her orchestration of movement and arrangement, especially as they express the narratological and characterological complications that shape the novel's love stories, emphasizes the structural significance of the marriage plot as plot. It is in this sense less a representation of social relations than the framework for a proto-sociological project.

The final chapter, "De Quincey's Systems," examines Thomas De Quincey's obsession with systems and argues that it crystallizes both the Enlightenment rage for system and its discontents. In a series of essays written on a wide range of topics, from the transport system and Greek democracy to political economy and the solar system, De Quincey was animated by a drive to systematize—to treat institutions, entities, and practices as though they comprised interconnecting parts whose distinctive features and attributes are amenable to discursive analysis. De Quincey's analytical procedure—which begins with an intuition about an underlying logic or structure and then pursues it so relentlessly that logical analysis seems to cross over into irrational obsession—demonstrates the excesses of the drive to systematize but also its irresistible appeal. Systems are fictions, but they are necessary—or at least unavoidable. And they necessarily fail. If their creation reflects a conviction that the mind, world, and universe are governed by reason, their failure is a testament to both the limitations of our reason and the persis-

tent desire to make sense of the mysteries and accidents we encounter, especially those that defy our comprehension. A brief coda, "The Strange System of Human Society," argues that, in *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley explores the disorder that shapes the social world through the creature's murderous pursuit of his creator.

In focusing on literature's contribution to social theory, I participate in the turn from understanding eighteenth-century fiction as the embodiment of personal experience (as in Ian Watt's seminal account of the novel's "formal realism") to approaching it in terms of what Deidre Lynch has called "fictions of social circulation."[32] By prioritizing the social over the individual (considering, for example, the prevalence of "it-narratives" in the eighteenth century), this approach situates the novel in a world transformed by the rise of modern commercial society and the emergence of a culture defined by exchange.[33] Lynch argues that the surveys conducted by Henry Fielding's and Smollett's protagonists "put a face on the crowd" and "make the nation make sense"; their grand tours are "a means of restoring balance to a social order turned topsy-turvy by the explosive growth of the marketplace."[34] Mobility and travel also figure in this study, but I contest the idea that fictional representations of social transformation have a reparative or compensatory function. The excursions and surveys that frame the narratives I consider do not alleviate confusion or offer ideological solutions to social problems. Instead, journeys around the metropolis, from the city to the country, from estate to estate, and among England, Wales, and Scotland trace characters' movements, actions, and interactions precisely to call into question the possibility of achieving a comprehensive view. Rather than promoting cohesion or restoring order, these works construct what Smollett calls "a large, diffused picture."[35] They analyze the "increasingly transactional universe of 'commerce and the arts'" described by J. G. A. Pocock only to acknowledge its elusiveness—arguing, in effect, that modernity is constituted by an impulse to systematize the social that is ultimately and inescapably inadequate.[36] I contend in this study that identifying and analyzing social processes that outstrip the systems that are imagined to define them is this tradition's most compelling contribution to literary history and social theory.

Lynch is far from alone in arguing that reading the novel primarily in terms of narratives about the birth of the modern individual has its limitations. If the representation of inwardness and subjectivity are our benchmarks, then texts that approach individuals from the outside (as types or

figures) or draw attention to their determination (by circumstance or plot) will necessarily appear to be failed attempts to achieve the psychological depth that is the hallmark of the realist novel. I challenge these assumptions by identifying a literary tradition that focuses on social relations rather than interiority and understands individuals in terms of their connections and circumstances rather than their personal qualities. It therefore follows recent scholarship that has complicated the easy identification of the novel with selfhood and interiority. Alex Woloch's description of the nineteenth-century novel's "character-system," Sandra Macpherson's argument for the centrality of accident and emplotment to both the eighteenth-century novel and the modern liberal subject, Jonathan Kramnick's study of externalism in eighteenth-century philosophy and literature, and Jesse Molesworth's account of the eighteenth-century novel's dual commitment to plot and chance powerfully demonstrate how factors seemingly extrinsic to the novel as we have come to understand it—accident rather than reason, plot or situation as opposed to character, law rather than individual psychology, what lies outside the mind rather than within it, character as produced by system as opposed to inherent qualities—are in fact central to the form.[37] My differences from their particular arguments will be apparent in the chapters that follow, but I want to acknowledge at the outset my indebtedness to these scholars. The long eighteenth century's interest in systems similarly emphasizes the significance of externalized structures—to the novel, the self, and the social world. The literary history of systems failure goes further, transforming the failure of structure and scheme into a critical perspective that prefigures the insights of both contemporary literary historical scholarship and theories of the social.

Chapter 1

Life without Theory in the *Life of Savage*

> While I recount what happened to me and what I did . . . , it strikes me how much easier it is with characters in a novel than in real life. In a novel the author invents characters and arranges them in convenient order. Now that I come to write biographically I have to tell of whatever actually happened and whoever naturally turns up. The story of a life is a very informal party; there are no rules of precedence and hospitality, no invitations.
>
> —Muriel Spark, *Loitering with Intent*

> Here is the past and all its inhabitants miraculously sealed as in a magic tank; all we have to do is to look and to listen and to listen and to look and soon the little figures—for they are rather under life size—will begin to move and to speak, and as they move we shall arrange them in all sorts of patterns of which they were ignorant, for they thought when they were alive that they could go where they liked; and as they speak we shall read into their sayings all kinds of meanings which never struck them, for they believed when they were alive that they said straight off whatever came into their heads. But once you are in a biography all is different.
>
> —Virginia Woolf, "I Am Christina Rossetti"

Muriel Spark and Virginia Woolf offer sharply opposed conceptions of biography. On the one hand, Spark distinguishes between biography and the novel, emphasizing the competing claims that each makes on the author. The novelist invents and arranges; the biographer is responsible for "whatever actually happened and whoever naturally turns up." It is "easier

with characters in novels than in real life," Spark's narrator Fleur Talbot believes, because while "the story of a life is a very informal party," that informality leaves the biographer at the mercy of her characters.[1] Whereas the novelist tells her characters what to do, the biographer is subject to their whims, and her narrative is merely the record of their comings and goings. Woolf, on the other hand, highlights the artificiality of biography and stresses the biographer's control over her subjects. The "magic tank" of a biography is a closed system, and although the biographer appears only to observe, Woolf argues that in looking and listening she in fact arranges her characters and discovers hidden meanings in their talk. The subjects of biography are blind to these patterns and to the biographer's interpretations. In life, they believe that they go where they want and say what they like, but life writing gives the lie to the idea of free will. As Woolf puts it, "Once you're in a biography all is different."[2]

On the face of it, Spark's understanding of biography seems closer to the common wisdom on life writing than Woolf's. Advice such as that given by the father of the protagonist of Benjamin D'Israeli's 1832 novel *Contarini Fleming*—"Read no history, nothing but biography, for that is life without theory"—may be long out of fashion, but the recourse to the idea that biography, even more than history, tells what really happened as it happened remains remarkably strong.[3] This commitment is especially evident in memoirs, where authors are held to a particularly exacting standard of truth. Consider, for example, the indignation that greeted James Frey when it was revealed that he had invented parts of his memoir *A Million Little Pieces* (2003). The overwhelmingly positive response to Frey's public shaming in print and on television (most notably, on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*) suggests the controversy's almost ritual significance. Maureen Dowd expressed a feeling shared by many commentators when she observed that "it was a huge relief, after our long national slide into untruth and no consequences . . . to see the Empress of Empathy icily hold someone accountable for lying."[4]

If the Frey scandal embodies the common sense view of biography as "whatever actually happened," we might understand the vehemence of the response to his fraud as a reaction against ideas about biography like Woolf's—in other words, as both a reflection and a rejection of the suspicion that life writing is often uncomfortably close to fiction. However strongly we hold to the notion that, in biography, fact and fiction can be cleanly divided, we also

seem to recognize that individuals' complicated inner lives, and the complexity of their relationships with other people and with their own actions, as well as the general slipperiness of perception, memory, and representation, make questions about accuracy particularly vexing in both autobiography and biography. Frey's response to the furor over his "memoir" at once acknowledges the memoirist's obligation to the truth and raises questions about the kind of truth life writing should be expected to deliver. In "A Note to the Reader," published in the *New York Times* in February 2006 and included in subsequent editions of *A Million Little Pieces* (which, after Oprah, the book's publisher marketed as a novel), Frey apologized for fraud but also sought to justify the alterations to his life story: "I believe . . . that memoir allows the writer to work from memory instead of from a strict journalistic or historical standard. It is about impression and feeling, about individual recollection. This memoir is a combination of facts about my life and certain embellishments. It is a subjective truth, altered by the mind of a recovering drug addict and alcoholic. Ultimately, it's a story, and one that I could not have written without having lived the life I've lived."[5] Spark makes a similar point in *Loitering with Intent*—and seemingly undoes her prior claims about "real life"—when she has Fleur Talbot say, "What is truth? I could have realized these people with my fun and games with their life-stories."[6]

The Frey controversy and Fleur's "fun and games with . . . life-stories" evoke a set of persistent questions about life writing. What does the biographer (or the autobiographer) owe to the truth? What kind of truth does life writing represent? How is it best achieved? Behind these questions lies a powerful anxiety about the project of life writing, and, in their different ways, Woolf, Spark, and Frey each implicitly ask whether the impulse to shape a story is the realization or the destruction of a truthful account of a life. Woolf's understanding of the issue is, perhaps surprisingly, the most straightforward. She argues that biography tends in the direction of fiction—and that the aims of life writing are in fact most fully realized in the novel.[7] Spark's apparent conservatism actually complicates the question of life writing; she expresses the idea that biography is defined by its commitment to the truth in a novel that proceeds to circle back on itself in a way that undermines the notion that "truth," imagined as a stable point of reference, is accessible at all. Finally, the Frey case makes it clear that the poststructuralist turn toward pure narrative (and ideas about the narrative construction of reality)

did not really, and perhaps could not, resolve these long-standing questions about the relationship between life writing and fiction.

This chapter examines Samuel Johnson's *Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage, Son of the Earl Rivers* (1744), one of the earliest and most instructive explorations of the problem of biography. Johnson's subject, the notorious poet Richard Savage, was his friend, and the *Life of Savage* was his first literary biography. While many readers have been troubled by his partiality, Johnson stakes his claim as a biographer on his intimate knowledge of his subject's life from the beginning.[8] In a letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine* announcing his intention to publish a life of Savage, Johnson argues that while "it may be reasonably imagined, that others may have the same design," because "it is not credible that they can obtain the same materials, it must be expected that they will supply from invention the want of intelligence; and that under the title of 'The Life of Savage,' they will publish only a novel, filled with romantick adventures and imaginary amours."[9] He claims that "intelligence" distinguishes a biography from a novel, but the *Life* itself tests the limits of this distinction. Johnson's aim is to make sense of Savage's life; the obstacle he encounters is that "materials" stand in need of interpretation or that, without interpretation, materials cease to signify as materials or, worse still, that interpretation tends inevitably to slide into "invention" or imagination.

More than anything else, the *Life of Savage* is the record of a writer's struggle with the meaning of his subject's comings and goings—in Spark's formulation, what happened to Savage and what he did. The attempt to represent the chaos of Savage's life makes the *Life of Savage* into a compelling, and formative, engagement with the questions about arrangement and order that Woolf identifies as the core of the biographer's art—what Fleur Talbot calls "fun and games." Johnson's reflections on life writing in the *Life of Savage*, *Rambler* 60, and in *The Lives of the Poets* are serious business, to be sure, but they nevertheless share something of Spark's playfulness. If the biographer's task is finally to pay respect "to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth," Johnson's biographies and writings on biography suggest that paying these debts entails a painstakingly self-reflexive and self-conscious representational practice.[10] In a powerful sense, the difficulties Johnson first encounters in writing Savage's life are not merely problems of biography but issues that would also haunt novelists from Sterne to Austen and that illuminate many of the peculiar features of the systems failures that are the subject of this book.

I.

Many of the most memorable scenes in the *Life of Savage* depict Savage wandering the streets of London. We first glimpse the author of *The Wanderer* (1729) as he paces outside the house of the woman he claimed was his mother, Anne Gerard, Countess of Macclesfield (later Lady Brett): "It was his frequent practice to walk in the dark evenings for several hours before her door, in hopes of seeing her as she might come by accident to the window, or cross her apartment with a candle in her hand."[11] The *Life*'s most dramatic episode—the killing of James Sinclair in a brawl at Robinson's Coffeehouse near Charing Cross—is the culmination of a nighttime "ramble about the streets" with two acquaintances Savage has met by chance in the city (873). Johnson observes that Savage "was generally censured for not knowing when to retire" (964–65) but argues that this "was not the defect of his judgment but of his fortune; when he left his company he was frequently to spend the remaining part of the night in the street" (965). Boswell's account of Johnson's relationship with Savage focuses on this life out-of-doors. "It is melancholy to reflect," Boswell writes, "that Johnson and Savage were sometimes in such extreme indigence, that they could not pay for a lodging; so that they have wandered together whole nights in the streets." His anecdote about "one night in particular, when Savage and [Johnson] walked round St. James's-square for want of a lodging," forms the basis in turn for Richard Holmes's fictionalization of the relationship in *Dr. Johnson and Mr. Savage*.[12] For Holmes, the story of the biographer and his subject walking "round the squares of London all one night, being too poor to afford either food or lodging but sustained by the passionate intimacy of their conversation" is a symbol of both their friendship and the power and appeal of biography itself.[13]

Johnson's sole description of Savage writing also finds him walking the streets, at work on his tragedy on the life of Thomas Overbury:

> During a considerable part of the time in which he was employed upon this performance he was without lodging and often without meat; nor had he any other conveniences for study than the fields or the streets allowed him; there he used to walk and form his speeches, and afterwards step into a shop, beg for a few moments the use of pen and ink, and write down what he had composed upon paper which he had picked up by accident.
>
> (867–68)

This picture of Savage wandering the city streets, exercising his genius on scraps of paper with borrowed ink, emblematizes the aimlessness of his peripatetic existence. The cumulative effect of these scenes is to forge a connection between key elements of Savage's character (poetic genius, reckless conviviality, filial disappointment) and the social dispossession reflected in his homelessness. The image of Savage composing a poem or a play while tramping through "the fields or the streets" encapsulates Johnson's request that we understand him both in light of and in opposition to his circumstances—that we see at once what he was and what he might have been. Frequently homeless and perpetually out of place, Savage lived "at the tables of other men" (891) and "for some part of the year generally lived by chance, eating only when he was invited to the tables of his acquaintances" (928). This dependence on others, Johnson argues, meant that "he was very seldom able to keep his promises or execute his own intentions" (862). As he puts it near the end of the *Life*, Savage "was not master of his own motions" (965). Forced to subordinate his own judgment and principles to the will of those who supported him, Savage becomes a cipher in his own life—and an allegory of the problem of life writing.

Savage's strange absence from his own story is reinforced in a variety of ways. In his early biography of Johnson, John Hawkins remarked on the relative imbalance of action and commentary in the *Life*: "If the events of Savage's life are few," he writes, "the reflections thereon are many, so that the work may as well be deemed a series of economical precepts as a narrative of facts."[14] Moreover, although Johnson quotes extensively from Savage's works, he offers few reports of what he says. When Savage does speak, he is like a stage actor delivering a soliloquy: his talk is set apart and framed for the reader, stripped of its conversational context. As Frank Brady puts it, "Like the grin of the Cheshire Cat, Savage's . . . voice—in indirect conversation, in his speech at the trial, in poems, and in letters—erupts and fades throughout the story."[15] Even more striking is how often Johnson has Savage exit the stage; he repeatedly all but disappears from the narrative of his own life. When Savage comes into money, for instance, he "regularly disappeared and returned":

> No sooner had he changed the bill than he vanished from the sight of all his acquaintances, and lay for some time out of the reach of all the inquiries that friendship or curiosity could make after him; at length he appeared again penni-

> less as before but never informed even those whom he seemed to regard most where he had been; nor was his retreat even discovered.
>
> (921)

Savage's work habits follow the same pattern: "When he felt an inclination to write, he always retired from the knowledge of his friends, and lay hid in an obscure part of the suburbs" (950). His friends are suspicious about his disappearances, and Johnson chides him for his attachment to "his darling privacy" (928), but the *Life* does not attempt to reconstruct these blank intervals; instead, it is almost as though Savage periodically ceases to exist. He disappears, and his friends (and biographer) are left with the task of trying to make sense of his actions. If his dependence on others prevents him from keeping his promises or executing his intentions, his tendency to withdraw comes to embody his powerlessness, as absence takes the place of "real life."

Savage's disappearances exemplify what Brady calls "the mystery of Savage himself . . . the complex opacity that characterizes someone we have known well and long but never really understood."[16] For Brady, this mystery reflects Johnson's divided approach to Savage: on the one hand, he is presented as a genius; on the other, as an object lesson in the need for prudence. He argues that these two views "never fuse; they proceed side by side until they conclude in the double ending that has puzzled critics," but this is not a fault. The interest of the text is the result of "the unresolved tensions between these two main structural patterns."[17] More broadly, Brady claims that "the *Life of Savage* offers a glorious tangle of theoretical problems. . . . From the point of view of Johnson's central strategy as embodied in its basic structural patterns, the *Life of Savage* can be classified as a fictional work masquerading as fact, with an unreliable narrator who thinks he is reliable."[18] Blakey Vermeule goes further than Brady, arguing that Savage is "a free-rider trapped in a world of reciprocal altruists" and that his solution to the problem of moral obligation is "to give up having an inner life with its usual complement of reason and explicable motives"—a refusal that amounts to a critique of the modern moral subject.[19] "Having an inner life is usually equated with a zone of freedom, however enforced by, and shot through with, social values," she argues. "Yet Savage perceives that having an inner life is tantamount to having the capacity to be obligated. Interiority is a conduit to society's normative demands."[20] For Vermeule, Savage's flatness is voluntary—a defensive posture designed to resist both the claims made

by other people and the incursions of the social world. "Savage has avoided obligation by turning himself into a flat character," she claims; when he must "confront his inner . . . knowledge of his roundness," it kills him.[21]

The idea that Savage repudiates his own interiority—that a person might turn herself into a flat character—is admittedly perverse. But Vermeule's and Brady's puzzling accounts of Savage's flatness and opacity begin to get at what is most perplexing, and most obscure, about the *Life of Savage*. The notion that Savage lacks an inner life resonates with Johnson's running commentary on the discrepancies between his works and his life: "that inconsistency of his writings with his conversation, which was so often to be observed" (898). In contrast to Savage's "generally precipitate" behavior, Johnson observes, in his writing "he always presented a strong sense of the dignity, the beauty, and the necessity of virtue" (909). Savage's works make him "a benefactor to the world," whereas his actions mark him as a particularly acute example of someone who says but does not: "The reigning error of his life was, that he mistook the love for the practice of virtue, and was indeed not so much a good man, as the friend of goodness" (909). (Here, friendship, a virtue in itself, works in the service of vice.) Johnson repeatedly describes Savage's equivocal character—but, unlike the critics, he stops short of making his impenetrability the defining principle of his personality. Instead, he seems determined that Savage remain a mystery. In the end, the *Life* does not help us understand him. In fact, it might be more accurate to say that it brings us closer to understanding why we can never really know him.

What I am suggesting is that Savage's "complex opacity" is actually a feature of Johnson's *Life*. Savage may well have been one of those people we know well and long but never really understand, but Johnson's real problem is with biography rather than Savage. Or, to put the point a different way, the difficulties Savage presents to the biographer lead to a confrontation with the fundamental problem of biography. To attribute the mysteries we encounter in the *Life* to Savage himself, as both Brady and Vermeule do, is to assume the success of Johnson's biographical project, as though the story he tells is a transparent window on Richard Savage's perplexing life. To understand Savage's flatness as a strategy takes the story that Johnson self-consciously presents as a puzzle—the opacity that he seems determined to penetrate—and makes sense of it (or dispenses with it) by naturalizing it as a feature of Savage's character. The inscrutability of Savage's inner life, or his apparent lack of an inner life, in other words, become his inner life. In

this way, the critics fall into what Johnson describes, in *Rambler* 4, as the characteristic error of novel readers: they mistake a representation for the real thing.[22]

What the critics miss in understanding Savage in this way (or in misrecognizing his biographical avatar) is the crucial sense in which his opacity serves as a perpetual reminder of the biographer's limited, and necessarily faulty, access to his subject. Despite Johnson's intimate knowledge of Savage, the *Life of Savage*, like all biographies, is narrated from the outside. If Johnson's aim is to examine Savage's inner life, to explore the qualities that define his character and the motivations behind his actions, the only facts to which he has access are external. This is an issue to which Johnson returns several times in later *Lives of the Poets*. In the *Life of Cowley*, for example, the conflicting accounts of prior biographers prompt him to exclaim, "So differently are things seen, and so differently are they shown; but actions are visible, though motives are secret."[23] In the *Life of Addison*, he remarks, "The fact is certain; the motives we must guess."[24] In the *Life of Roscommon*, he even admits that this lack of access to the inner lives of biographical subjects opens the way for invention: "Thus it is that characters are written: we know somewhat, and we imagine the rest."[25] Perhaps the strongest acknowledgement of the problem of biographical knowledge is the claim, in *Idler* 84, that the life stories "commonly of most value" are those "in which the writer tells his own story."[26] In this instance, Johnson silently weighs the problems with biography against the perils of autobiography and finds in favor of the autobiographer.

Some of Johnson's statements about biography suggest that it poses no epistemological problems at all. In his letter to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, for example, the possession of "materials" is presented as the key to successful biographical writing; those who lack "intelligence" will "publish only a novel." In *Rambler* 60, he approaches the issue from the opposite direction, criticizing writers whose only qualification is the possession of information that "might be collected from publick papers, but [who] imagine themselves writing a life when they exhibit a chronological series of actions or preferments" (323). In the *Life of Savage*, however, his approach is more skeptical and less pragmatic; he is concerned both with finding the best way to tell Savage's story and with reflecting on the limitations of life writing. This self-consciousness is embodied in the emphasis that the *Life* places on the externality—and circumstantiality—of its narrative, a quality that manifests itself in a variety

of ways. Robert Folkenflik has remarked that the "*Life of Savage* depend[s] to a large extent on the significance of gestures, looks, and words upon some observer."[27] Brady's account of the text's "crisscrossing character, thematic, and verbal patterns," which reflect the ordering and arrangement of Savage's story, also emphasizes that the biographer works from the outside in.[28] Vermeule makes a similar point as well when she describes the "complete world" that the *Life of Savage* "brings . . . into being" and highlights its structure: "The world is highly divided into spaces, roles, local cultures, and individual psyches; yet it is neither fragmented nor atomistic. It is compressed, like a Dutch interior, and layered into groups of people with similar status and rank."[29]

For Vermeule, "perhaps the most crucial aspect of this society" is that it reveals that "identity is relational"—an idea reinforced by the attention she and Folkenflik and Brady all pay to the role of positioning and patterning in the *Life*, especially in relation to Savage's social existence. If the *Life of Savage* helps us discover that identity is relational, it is perhaps because society is obviously and self-evidently so. It is second nature to think about social life in terms of distinctions between high and low, inside and outside, near and far. In the *Life*, however, Johnson does not merely employ these familiar terms; he analyzes them. Because the biographer must approach his subject from the outside and can only interpret or represent motives by way of facts or actions, the kind of life with which biography is concerned is necessarily social. The most private thoughts and feelings are revealed, according to Johnson's conception of life writing, through the subject's relations with the world outside the self. This point might seem blindingly obvious, but its significance has received little critical attention. Brady touches on the issue when he suggests that critics have failed to recognize "the basic organizing principle" of the *Life of Pope* (which he describes as "the acknowledged paradigmatic example among the *Lives of the Poets*").[30] To exemplify this critical oversight, he cites Lawrence Lipking's "puzzled" claim that "too much of it concerns local quarrels, and depends on references or on sequences of thought that are not specified, for it to possess the self-contained harmony of art"—an assessment that recalls the opacity and elusiveness of the *Life of Savage*.[31] According to Brady, making sense of the *Life of Pope* in terms of the text's use of its sources or its "thematic concerns" and "general attributes" misses how, "in a typically eighteenth-century way, Johnson sees Pope as a poet in relation to other men, in his social context, in his *public* character."[32]

Understood "as a study of the poet in society," Brady argues, "almost every detail falls into place."[33]

The *Life of Savage* works in much the same way, with the crucial difference that placing Savage in his social context proves to be such a difficult task. In a memorable phrase, Hawkins describes Savage as "such an one as is seldom exhibited to view; a man dropped into the world as from a cloud."[34] Indeed, Savage seems singularly alienated from the kind of society that makes sense of Pope (and the *Life of Pope*). This is the point of Savage's abandonment by his "mother" and the crux of the story he told about himself. It is the narrative recounted in the anonymous 1727 *Life of Richard Savage*, on which Johnson depends, which describes Savage as an "unhappy young Gentleman," whose misfortunes are the result of "being . . . abandoned on all Sides to the Frowns of Fortune and a capricious World."[35] It is the basis of William Epstein's incisive characterization of Savage as "a classic transitional figure, a fatherless, unpatronized, disestablished, self-promoting author who became (to use the phrase with which Goldsmith dubbed Beau Nash) a 'child of the public.'"[36] It is also, finally, the reason that Savage's homelessness is so central to the *Life*. Savage's wandering stands for his moral transgressions, and Johnson repeatedly attributes "the inconstancy of his conduct" to his lack of "a settled habitation" (891) and that he had "so long . . . been accustomed to live by chance" (897). According to this logic, Savage's homelessness is at once the cause and the sign of his failings. It becomes a kind of figure—a formal schema that captures both his lack of direction and the problem he poses for the biographer whose task it is to situate his subject in his social context.

II.

Johnson's account of Savage's most notorious act, the killing of James Sinclair, is the *Life*'s most dramatic example of its figurative imagination. Looking back on the incident, for which Savage was first convicted and later pardoned, Johnson remarks that "it is not yet determined, whether it ought to be mentioned as a crime or a calamity" (873). His account oscillates between understanding the murder as something Savage has done and something that has happened to him. He focuses less on Savage's conduct than the circumstances that put him in the wrong place at the wrong time, breaking the incident down into a series of chance encounters. Savage leaves the chaos and temptations of London for Richmond "that he might pursue his

studies with less interruption" (873) but returns to the city to settle his debt to his former landlord. Back in Westminster, he happens "accidentally" to meet two acquaintances in the street, which leads to late-night drinking in a coffeehouse (873). Savage "would willingly have gone to bed in the same house; but there was not room for the whole company, and therefore they agreed to ramble about the streets, and divert themselves with such amusements as should offer themselves till morning" (873). Walking the streets, they "happened unluckily" (873) on an open coffeehouse, where one of Savage's companions argues with another group of revelers who are slow to settle their bill and vacate the room promised to Savage's party. "The hurry of the dispute was such, that it was not easy to discover the truth with relation to particular circumstances" (875)—but when the fight is over, Savage has killed a man.

The murder of James Sinclair dramatizes the sort of accidents that constitute life in the city. In London, chance trumps intentionality, and wandering overwhelms purpose. Along these lines, Thomas Reinert has read the *Life of Savage* as "an example of how to bear and even simply conceptualize the condition of severe social estrangement in the city."[37] Living in London is living "by chance" (897, 928), and the urban crowd intensifies the difficulty of assessing moral action. In cities, Reinert claims, "it is hard, maybe impossible, to grasp the relation between individuals and circumstances. In a crowd it is unclear how to attribute consequences to someone's action; it can be unclear whether one's actions have any effect at all."[38] Savage's actions have an effect, but, in tracking the chance occurrences and accidental meetings that lead to the killing of Sinclair, Johnson's narrative ends up stressing the circumstantiality of the act itself. In the end, murder is at once a cause and an effect—an intentional action and the consequence of a set of contingent circumstances—and the *Life* suggests that Savage is as much a victim as Sinclair. Savage's own judgment of his conduct is both more ambivalent and less forgiving than his biographer's: he "appeared neither to consider himself a murderer, nor as a man wholly free from the guilt of blood," and, when the incident was cited as an example of the proposition that "'the best may sometimes deviate from virtue,' . . . Savage remarked, that it was no very just representation of a good man, to suppose him liable to drunkenness, and disposed in his riots to cut throats" (884).

From the standpoint of the law, we might wonder whether the killing of James Sinclair is a murder at all. Savage did not plan Sinclair's death; at trial,

he urges "the suddenness of the whole action, and the impossibility of any ill design, or premeditated malice" (875). He appears to have formed no specific intention to cause harm. Moreover, one need not conclude that he acted in self-defense and at "the hazard of his own life" (875) to understand the act as manslaughter rather than murder—a lesser offense precisely because it reflects a diminished degree of agency.[39] In 1727, a homicide arising from a quarrel was classed as a "chance medley"—a "mixed chance" falling between murder and pure accident—and the idea that different kinds of killings "reflected different shades of moral culpability" was still in the process of being rationalized.[40] Rather than clarifying Savage's action, the law offers another context in which it looks ambiguous; the effect is that an act that is seemingly defined by its finality is rendered strangely equivocal.[41] This equivocation is evident in the trial record as well; it reflects a kind of strange confusion between Savage and Sinclair. The two men are so similarly described as to seem almost interchangeable. According to one witness, Sinclair "bore the character of an idle person, who had no settled place of residence"—a description that applied equally to Savage.[42] Murderer and victim are linked by a shared rootlessness that makes them particularly subject to accident and chance; their meeting is at once the epitome and the opposite of fate. If the killing of Sinclair is in one sense an accident, in another it is a kind of self-murder. Its logic is that of the double: Savage meets his doppelgänger at a crossroads (Robinson's coffeehouse near Charing Cross) and kills his shade to save his self. In a sense, the murder of James Sinclair is suicide by proxy.

The doubling of murderer and victim is a version of the more general doubling of character and circumstance throughout the *Life of Savage*. Savage claims to be the illegitimate son of Lady Macclesfield and Lord Rivers; he becomes the author of *The Bastard*. Savage is a struggling writer—Lipking calls the *Life* "*the* masterpiece of Grub Street," and Pat Rogers claims that it was largely responsible for "the rise of the Grub Street myth"—and also the author of *An Author to Be Let*.[43] He wanders the streets of London and writes *The Wanderer*. Johnson understands Savage's profession in terms of a related interplay between chance and necessity. Following Savage's version of his story, Johnson explains that, having been rejected by his "mother," Savage "was therefore obliged to seek some other means of support; and, having no profession, became by necessity an author" (858). The idea that one is driven to become a writer—that authorship is at once an accidental circumstance and necessitated by hardship—discloses the terms of the closest af-

filiation between Savage and his biographer (who famously observed that "no man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money").[44] Taken as an author's life (and perhaps the first literary biography), the *Life of Savage* is as much Johnson's story as Savage's, and Johnson's interest in Savage has long been understood in autobiographical, as well as biographical, terms.[45] In the *Life of Savage*, authors are born out of necessity, and becoming an author means having "no profession." Professional authorship begins, in other words, as a desperate response to dispossession, and, over the course of the *Life*, it becomes a curiously self-canceling action, as the writer's work is repeatedly shown to be circular and self-defeating.

This self-consuming model of authorship is established near the beginning of the *Life*, in an anecdote about Savage and his first benefactor, Richard Steele. Called to Steele's house early one morning, Savage agrees to accompany him to an inn on Hyde Park corner, where Steele informs him that he is there to compose a pamphlet and "desired him to come thither that he might write for him" (861). Throughout the morning, over dinner (Savage wants wine, which Steele reluctantly provides), and into the afternoon, "Sir Richard dictated, and Savage wrote" (861). When the work is done, Steele reveals that he has no money to pay the bill and sends Savage out to sell the pamphlet to raise the necessary funds. Johnson explains that Steele has left home "only to avoid his creditors" and written the pamphlet "only to discharge his reckoning" at the inn (861). The episode paints a picture of authorship as a futile economy, in which all that the work of writing can sustain is an existence that is comically, and almost literally, hand to mouth.

Johnson's inventory of Savage's many literary failures—his lost contribution to the Bangorian controversy, two failed comedies, the Overbury tragedy, a *Miscellany of Poems* announced in *The Plain Dealer* by Aaron Hill with a plea to "patronize merit in distress" (871), and his strange self-appointment as "Volunteer Laureate" to Queen Anne—underscores this dismal account of authorship. Even Savage's most successful works—*The Bastard*, *An Author to Be Let*, and *The Wanderer*—reflect on his failure as they turn to autobiography in order to mythologize his dispossession. Johnson further blurs the boundary between life and art by describing Savage as though he were himself a work of art. His quotations from critics' objections to *The Wanderer* sound like fanciful descriptions of the poem's author: it is "irregular . . . obscure . . . perplexed"; "the whole . . . is not so much a regular fabric as a heap of shining materials thrown together by accident, which

strikes rather with the solemn magnificence of a stupendous ruin than the elegant grandeur of a finished pile" (893). Savage is obsessed with the correction of his works in proof—Johnson remarks that "the intrusion or omission of a comma was sufficient to discompose him" (895)—as though there were no boundary between writer and text. But the most dramatic transformation of Savage into a work of art comes at the end of the *Life*, when, after numerous schemes for publishing his works by subscription have failed, his friends (including Johnson and Pope) take up a collection to keep him out of harm's way by sending him to Swansea. In this last "scheme"—"that he should retire into Wales, and receive an allowance of fifty pounds a year, to be raised by a subscription" (940)—the author is finally substituted for his works.

This proliferation of analogies between life and work suggests that Johnson's interest in writing Savage's biography was fueled at least in part by the attraction of his strangely allegorical life. Accordingly, the figures that structure Savage's story shed light on those that shape Johnson's understanding of biography more generally:

> All joy or sorrow for the happiness or calamities of others is produced by an act of the imagination, that realizes the event however fictitious, or approximates it however remote, by placing us, for a time, in the condition of him whose fortune we contemplate; so that we feel, while the deception lasts, whatever emotions would be excited by the same good or evil happening to ourselves.
>
> (318–19)

In this passage from *Rambler* 60, the source of biography's particular power, and its superiority to the novel, is its ability to elicit our sympathy—what Hume calls "the chief source of moral distinctions."[46] But even as Johnson makes the case for biography's superiority to other kinds of writing, he punctuates his argument with a series of qualifications. In biography, the event realized by the imagination is, at least potentially, "fictitious"; its realization is an approximation; its location, "remote." The passage's stipulations move back and forth between acknowledging the imaginary nature of sympathetic identification and the limitations of time and place. The imagination places us in another's condition "for a time"; we feel what he feels "while the deception lasts." Life writing begins to sound like the novel—both, as Woolf will argue, are forms of fiction making. Fictionality and distance, ephemerality and deception are woven together and cross one an-

other, and Johnson's characteristically chiastic phrasing simultaneously identifies factors that inhibit sympathetic response and holds these opposed forces in suspension. As the Scottish moral philosophers recognized, sympathy partakes of the unreal (I am not you; I don't feel your feelings, or at least don't know it if I do). It is ephemeral and operates at a distance (if only the space between where you end and I begin). These gaps, both literal and metaphorical, at once separate us from those with whom we would sympathize and mark sympathy's condition of possibility. What is perhaps most striking about the passage from the *Rambler* is Johnson's style—the way that the acknowledgment of these obstacles slows the unfolding of the thought, creating delays and distances that mimic those the passage describes and emphasizing the conditions that enable or disable sympathetic response.

It is important, too, that Johnson isn't merely calling for more, or more complete, information. Sympathetic identification depends on a particular kind of detail. The biographer must find facts that make us feel as though we've been through an experience ourselves—or that it could happen to us: "Our passions are . . . more strongly moved, in proportion as we can more readily adopt the pains or pleasures proposed to our minds, by recognising them as once our own, or considering them as naturally incident to our state of life" (319). If the subject of a biography is too remote, too distant from our experience and concerns, we are unlikely to be moved; the biographer's job is to search out information capable of drawing readers into an intimate relationship with his or her subject. As Johnson puts it in *Rambler* 208, writers who "deviate . . . from reality . . . become less useful, because their lessons will fail of application," and if the reader finds "no likeness to the phantom before him," he "laughs or rages" but "is not reformed."[47] When writers depart from resemblance and reality, "the mind of the reader is carried away from the contemplation of his own manners," the sympathetic bond is broken, and writing intended to educate as well as entertain becomes an impotent fiction.[48]

Because sympathetic identification depends on "parallel circumstances, and kindred images" (319), Johnson argues that it is better served by "the minute details of daily life" than "publick occurrences" (321). Here he follows Plutarch—as does Boswell, who offers a passage from the *Life of Alexander* as an account of his own biographical method: "Nor is it always in the most distinguished atchievements that men's virtues or vices may be discerned; but very often an action of small note, a short saying, or a jest, shall distin-

guish a person's real character more than the greatest sieges, or the most important battles."[49] *Rambler* 60's best-known claims—"there has rarely passed a life of which a judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful" (320) or "more knowledge may be gained of a man's real character, by a short conversation with one of his servants, than from a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree, and ended with his funeral" (322)—reflect the conviction that "the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory, and are rarely transmitted by tradition" (323).

But while Johnson privileges "domestick privacies" and "invisible circumstances" over the public record, privacy alone is not enough (321). Biographical facts must be "particular" but also "important." He argues, for example, that in distinguishing his subject "from the rest of mankind" by "the irregularity of his pulse," Addison's biographer Tickell has told us nothing of value (322). When he refers to "parallel circumstances, and kindred images," Johnson has in mind facts that compel our attention by revealing something significant about the subject. He suggests, moreover, that the substance of these details is actually less important than their correlation with the reader's experience. Biographical facts, in other words, are distinguished by their form. As an example, Johnson cites Sallust, "the great master of nature," who provides precisely the kind of telling detail biography requires when he tells us of the Roman conspirator Catiline "that 'his walk was now quick, and again slow,' as an indication of a mind revolving something with violent commotion" (321). Johnson focuses on how Sallust connects Catiline's walk to his thoughts; psychological conflict is reflected in physical movement, and Catiline's gait becomes an emblem of his mind. Tickell's observation about Addison's pulse is pointless not only because it is an irrelevant detail but because it fails to resonate with Addison's life—or it is irrelevant because it fails to resonate. Sallust, by contrast, makes Catiline's walk into a metaphor.[50]

The particular power of this example is that it runs in two directions at once: Catiline's physical movements reflect his mind, and, in turn, Sallust's description of his subject in motion moves the reader. Of course, to say that we are "moved" by a text is itself a figure of speech and a convention of the discourse of sympathy. But the idea that we might be so moved by representations of physical movement, that manner and gestures reveal character, and that significant (which is to say signifying) behavior descends to the

level of how a person moves his body or holds his hands, how she turns her head or inflects a particular phrase, assumes a powerful role in a range of eighteenth-century texts. Catiline's walk reflects his character; Sallust's handling of it makes it into a metaphor and transforms the biographical subject into an allegorical figure. For Johnson, the significance of the figure has to do with how it joins the particular and the general. As Sallust describes it, how Catiline moves is a circumstantial detail that tells us something about him. In identifying this convergence as a feature of effective biography—in making it, in effect, a formal feature of life writing—Johnson answers *Rambler* 60's implicit question about the source of biography's power and appeal.

From this standpoint, the *Life of Savage* looks like a concerted effort to test the limits of the genre, and Savage himself becomes a kind of experimental subject designed to challenge the reader's ability to sympathize. He is charismatic and appealing, but also difficult and elusive. Every time we draw near to him, he moves away again. As Johnson puts it in a typical formulation, "It was his peculiar happiness, that he scarcely ever found a stranger whom he did not leave a friend; but it must likewise be added, that he had not often a friend long, without obliging him to become a stranger" (897). This is a remark about the difficulty of being Savage's friend, but it also describes the same pattern of self-destructive and self-negating behavior that structures Johnson's account of the killing of Sinclair. When Johnson calls Savage "a man equally distinguished by his virtues and vices; and at once remarkable for his weaknesses and abilities" (963), the figure encapsulates the central contradiction of Savage's character in a rhetorical crossing that joins opposing terms in parallel phrases. The formulation seems to imply that "virtues and vices" and "weakness and abilities" cancel one another out. But rather than a simple negation, the chiasmatic placement of these antithetical phrases evokes Savage's vacillation between extremes of character and conduct—and gestures toward the perilous crossings that thwart his intentions.

Johnson is the acknowledged master of this kind of parallelism, and chiastic structures organize many of his works. What the *Life of Savage* suggests, however, is that, more than a distinctive feature of Johnson's style, chiasmus is also a form of thinking that is inseparable from the project of life writing. Chiastic figures appear so frequently in the *Life* that they seem to reveal its deep logic; by producing a kind of second-order figuration, Johnson describes Savage but also, in the very workings of his rhetorical formulations, shows us things about him. When he writes that Savage "spent

his life between want and plenty; or, what was yet worse, between beggary and extravagance" (884), he simultaneously captures his recklessness and the suffering that is its result and invites us to conceive of Savage in terms of the mobility of the figures that describe him. Like Johnson's parallel phrases, Savage shuttles between extremes—and this mobility, at once personal and rhetorical, as much as Savage's wayward behavior, is the point of Johnson's formulation.

III.

In the *Life of Johnson*, Boswell describes Joshua Reynolds's first encounter with the *Life of Savage*: "Upon his return from Italy he met with it in Devonshire, knowing nothing of its authour, and began to read it while he was standing with his arm leaning against a chimney-piece. It seized his attention so strongly, that, not being able to lay down the book till he had finished it, when he attempted to move, he found his arm totally benumbed."[51] While we could take this scene of reading as an example of biography's power to "enchain the heart by irresistible interest," we might equally understand Reynolds's fixation by the *Life* as an effect of its difficulty (319).[52] Like Savage, the text pulls us in only to push us away—creating and commenting on the uncomfortable tension between life and writing. In the *Life of Addison*, Johnson writes that "to write and to live are very different," and Richard Savage's life affords ample proof of the maxim.[53] The *Life of Savage* underscores the difference between living and writing in its assertion that writing cannot sustain the kind of chaos and mystery that so marked Savage's life. The *Life* offers no clear conclusion and no settled judgment on its subject's character. We are left with the impression that, like the chiastic figure itself, Savage's life is a complicated act of negation, the tying and untying of a knot. If his life is a puzzle, in chiasmus Johnson seems to find a trope that encapsulates his subject's enigmatic nature.

Maria Edgeworth's remarks on biography in the preface to her novel *Castle Rackrent* shed a helpful light on the centrality of style to Johnson's practice as a biographer. Edgeworth follows Johnson in claiming that the "real characters" of men are revealed by "their careless conversations, their half finished sentences" rather than "their actions or their appearance in public."[54] The story of the Rackrent family's decline is accordingly narrated by an old servant, Thady Quirk, who is equally distinguished by his devotion to the family and his inability to dissemble. In him, Edgeworth rejects the idea

that "the value of biography depends upon the taste and judgment of the biographer," arguing instead that "a plain unvarnished tale is preferable to the most highly ornamented narrative" (2). Old Thady is a gossip; we see right through his story and immediately recognize the sins and failings of the masters he loves and serves. A skilled biographer, by contrast, has the power to mislead, and Edgeworth offers the *Life of Savage* as proof:

> If her Grace the Duchess of Newcastle, instead of penning her lord's elaborate eulogium, had undertaken to write the life of Savage, we should not have been in any danger of mistaking an idle, ungrateful libertine, for a man of genius and virtue. The talents of a biographer are often fatal to his reader.
>
> (3)

Edgeworth's objection to the *Life of Savage* is not that Johnson is partial to Savage; Thady and the Duchess of Newcastle are partial to their subjects, too. What makes Johnson "fatal" to his reader is his skill as a writer: "Where we see that a man has the power, we may naturally suspect that he has the will to deceive us, and those who are used to literary manufacture know how much is often sacrificed to the rounding of a period or the pointing of an antithesis" (2–3). If it seems at first that Edgeworth's point is that a talented biographer will use his power to mislead, what she actually says is that the talented biographer is himself led astray by his power. What is "sacrificed to the rounding of a period or the pointing of an antithesis," in other words, is biographical truth.

Edgeworth's critique of Johnson suggests just how deep style goes. The chiastic pattern of doing and undoing that Johnson discovers in Richard Savage's life doesn't stop with Savage; it also consumes the biographer, the biography, and, finally (as the image of Reynolds reading the *Life* suggests), the reader. Johnson tracks Savage's movements and analyzes his actions to understand him, but he ends up no closer to the truth. From the outset, he presents Savage as a riddle to be solved, and the final pages of the *Life* continue to oscillate between sympathy and condemnation.[55] Johnson's pleas for understanding are themselves frustratingly circular. He claims, for example, that "if his miseries were sometimes the consequences of his faults, he ought not yet to be wholly excluded from compassion, because his faults were very often the effects of his misfortunes" (892). In the chiastic movement from "miseries" to "faults" and "faults" to "misfortunes," causal relationships are reversed, and what the first half of the sentence asserts, the

second withdraws. Johnson almost seems to be saying that trying to make sense of Savage is an exercise in futility. We might revise the image of the knot and suggest that the *Life* unties the knot of Savage's life only to tie it up again.

Johnson's attempt to understand Savage's life does not resolve its contradictions. Instead, it describes them in a way that yields a more profound opacity. From this perspective, the *Life*'s tracing of the raveling and unraveling of Savage's life finally represents the undoing rather than the realization of Johnson's biographical theory. *Rambler* 60 argues that discovering telling details requires the biographer to identify what counts and separate it from what doesn't; "invisible circumstances" illuminate character only when they disclose larger correspondences and patterns (321). If Addison had been irresolute, the irregularity of his pulse could have been a significant fact; if Catiline had been a steadfast and loyal servant of the Roman Republic, his walk would have been no more revealing than Addison's pulse. In these biographies, correspondences and patterns are what separate meaningful information from meaningless trivia. In the *Life of Savage*, however, pattern itself is the problem. Even as Johnson's chiasmic phrases figure the opposing impulses that govern Savage's life, they give his subject's chaotic existence a determinate shape, and in shaping the life into a narrative, the biographer gives it a form. But if the truth of Savage's life is that it is a knot, once it is unraveled it is no longer his life. Johnson's chiastic structures figure chance and contingency, but, given a life that is a web of circumstances, the very act of figuration—finding a pattern or making a figure—is a distortion. Transforming the biographical subject into an allegorical figure falsifies the life.

In *Rambler* 60, Johnson claims that the biographer who works "from personal knowledge" is sometimes tempted "to conceal, if not invent" (323). The *Life of Savage* does not conceal Savage's faults—but the very effort to make sense of his story leads Johnson to invent, to cross the line that separates fact and fiction. Savage's sins, like Augustine's, are the result of acting "without choosing"; he is "more acted upon than acting."[56] Following Augustine, Johnson invites us to understand Savage's transgressions as punishments in themselves. But the *Life* nevertheless suggests that the moment the biographer moves beyond the simple rehearsal of facts publicly known, he risks doing violence to the truth. When he describes Savage sleeping "on a bulk, or in cellars, or in a glass-house among thieves and beggars" and laments the fate of a "man of exalted sentiments, extensive views, and curi-

ous observations" who "might have assisted the statesman" and "enlightened the moralist" (929), Johnson invents a Savage who never existed. Part of the problem is that Savage's passivity and remoteness make him a blank canvas onto which Johnson projects his own ideas (and ironically mirror the rhetoric of distance on which biography's Enlightenment project depends). The deeper issue, however, is that invention is less a mistake than the essential condition of life writing. To claim that biographers must balance the "regard" due "to the memory of the dead" with the "respect to be paid to knowledge, to virtue, and to truth" makes biography a difficult task (323). To suggest that the biographer and the aims of biography are essentially at cross-purposes makes it a paradox and an impossible project. The final irony of the *Life of Savage* is Johnson's discovery that writing a life, especially a life that was defined by chance and accident, reflects a drive to order that is the condition of writing itself.

Chapter 2

Sterne and the Uses of Disorder

Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramon,
The maker's rage to order words of the sea,
Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,
And of ourselves and of our origins,
In ghostlier demarcations, keener sounds.

—Wallace Stevens, "The Idea of Order at Key West"

Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* opens with a fragment of conversation. "—They order, said I, this matter better in France—," Parson Yorick remarks to his valet.[1] The valet responds with a challenge, "—You have been in France? said my gentleman, turning quick upon me, with the most civil triumph in the world—," which prompts Yorick's immediate departure for Calais, setting in motion the novel's journey. Yorick's unnamed English servant plays no further role in the narrative; he is quickly replaced by his French counterpart, La Fleur. But, in an important sense, his response sets the terms for the novel as a whole. Yorick's journey is Sterne's vehicle for staging sentimental encounters in a variety of unfamiliar social situations, and the idea of order is at the center of the novel's examination of the social world. Neither the "matter" to which Yorick refers nor the "order" that he believes constitutes a superiority of the French over the English is specified, but the general impulse toward order inscribed within this fragmentary exchange is finally more significant than any of its particular instantiations.[2] Its ambiguity reflects Sterne's paradoxical conviction that it is at once incredibly difficult to articulate the general rules that order social experience and yet seemingly impossible to imagine the social apart from such principles of order.

The drive to discover or create order, as well as its inevitable unraveling, are inescapable in Sterne. Yorick's journey, Uncle Toby's war games, Sir Walter's system building, and Tristram's autobiography are all animated by a rage for order. For each of these characters, to varying degrees, the impulse is pathological and defines a hobby-horsical obsession. To call attention to it is nothing new. Generations of critics have understood Sterne's dramatizations of chance and arbitrariness as a critique of Enlightenment epistemology and an argument about the world's fundamental disorder. Thomas Keymer has compared the agonized self-consciousness of *Tristram Shandy*'s fictional autobiographer with the self-assurance of the earlier tradition of spiritual autobiography. In such works as John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), he argues, the author "is simply the witness of patterns that are objectively given and transcendently true, with God as guarantor of their meanings."[3] By contrast, Tristram must find or create his own patterns—and must do so with the failed efforts of his father and uncle fully in view. A similar assessment of the epistemological disorder of the later eighteenth century informs Earl Wasserman's claim that "its truly representative folk—those who were molded wholly by the indigenous intellectual and cultural forces—are to be found among the members of the Shandy household."[4] "In Tristram's world," Wasserman writes, "meaning had become a function of each person's private, subjective concerns, which alone remained as an interpretive organization."[5] The same perception grounds E. M. Forster's famous claim that "obviously a god is hidden in *Tristram Shandy*, his name is Muddle, and some readers cannot accept him."[6]

This chapter takes up the question of order and disorder in Sterne's fiction. I argue that Forster's assessment is exactly right, but not in the way he intends. Sterne's point, and his interest in the god Muddle, is precisely that we cannot accept him—the kind of acceptance Forster imagines is, Sterne maintains, in fact impossible. While we tend to think of randomness as inevitable (in keeping with the second law of thermodynamics), the strange truth is that absolute randomness is nearly as impossible as pure order.[7] As Samuel Johnson discovered in the *Life of Savage*, moreover, representing disorder in writing is a self-defeating task. In giving shape to a life—especially a life defined by disorder—the biographer runs the risk of distorting it, because writing itself is necessarily an imposition of order. In the case of *Tristram Shandy*, readers cannot accept Muddle because, as the lengths to which Sterne must go to depict accident and contingency finally make clear, the

novel's representation of disorder is an illusion created by an ordering mind. Sterne does not challenge readers to accept disorder so much as represent his characters' inevitably frustrated attempts to overcome it. Chance and circumstance also shape *A Sentimental Journey*—and they do so precisely because "no man cares to have his virtues the sport of contingencies" (70). Yorick abhors circumstance, but his story is the record of his subjection to it. As he admits while visiting Versailles, "I am governed by circumstances—I cannot govern them" (209). Yorick's travels present a series of shifting opportunities, and he submits to each in turn; like Tristram (and also like Savage), he is "more acted upon than acting."[8] Rather than trying to mimic the disorder of lived reality (as did Johnson), however, Sterne thematizes it. He doesn't ask us to choose one version of reality over the other. Instead, one of the novels' central ironies is that the drive for order is both a matter of course (you can't not do it) and an impossible project (it can't be done). Rather than novels about disorder, *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* are about the collision between the impossibility of ordering the world and the impossibility of not ordering the novel.

In the previous chapter I argued that the representation of disorder and of "invisible circumstances" is a central dilemma of life writing.[9] For Johnson, Richard Savage presented a particularly compelling biographical case and an especially difficult test for the biographer because his life was a mess. In finding patterns in Savage's failures, Johnson troubled the idea of biographical truth by transforming his subject into a rhetorical figure and his life into a story. Sterne approaches the problem of narrative order and disorder from the opposite direction, by narrating a will to order that is inevitably thwarted. In this sense, Sterne's fiction plays out the biographer's problem in reverse. His novels trace their characters' never-ending efforts to understand and analyze their lives, but they do so to dramatize, and ironize, their repeated failures to achieve their ostensible aims. Sterne in turn transforms failure itself into a kind of ordering principle, as its thematization becomes a means of gesturing toward the contingency that narrative cannot finally embody. If Johnson's problem is that he can't stop making sense, Sterne's characters can't escape the contingencies and circumstances that rule their lives. Like Savage, characters in Sterne are puzzles or knots; their motivations and intentions are opaque, even to themselves, and their narratives, like Savage's, figure processes of raveling and unraveling. But biography differs from fiction, and Savage differs from Tristram and Yorick. Savage is a mystery to

Johnson, but Sterne's narrators are his creations, and, while they are mysteries to themselves, they are known to him. For Johnson, the failure of biography is the triumph of realism. For Sterne, the power of the novel has to do with its capacity to expose this imposture and thereby invoke the reality the form claims to represent.

Jesse Molesworth and Christina Lupton have each recently claimed that a struggle "with the representation of uncertainty" is central to the eighteenth-century novel.[10] In *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, Molesworth argues that Tristram's proposed "chapter on chances" encapsulates a fundamental paradox of the novel form: "If events unfold in chapters, according to a scripted narrative, they can hardly be said to happen by chance, which designates the absence of cause or preparation."[11] The novel, he claims, denies "what is most essential to chance, its capriciousness or unpredictability."[12] Taking Molesworth's observation as her point of departure, Lupton arrives at a similar insight by way of the history of the book. "While stories can in principle be said to unravel any which way," she writes, "in order for them to arrive in the reader's hand, a specific selection of events must have been made"—and the simple fact of the book's physical existence and material form emphasizes the difficulty of representing uncertainty.[13] What Molesworth and Lupton together make clear (especially given their very different approaches) is that as hard as Sterne's narrators work to tame chance and neutralize random events by explaining and analyzing them, the novels they inhabit cannot help but do so. What this chapter will emphasize is that Sterne does not merely observe the tension between accident and necessity that characterizes the novel as a form; he makes it into an engine for the production of fiction.

Sterne capitalizes on the inevitability of design and shapes it to suit his purposes by making the quest for certain knowledge into his characters' problem. Writing cannot capture the contingency of real life or translate it seamlessly to the page; all it can do is feign chance and accident in a way that disguises the fact that, in any written record, everything has been decided in advance. Sterne demonstrates that the novel's most powerful access to the "real" is perhaps not by way of realistic representation but through stories about characters who fail in their attempts to order the world. In *Tristram Shandy*, this project takes shape out of the persistent frustration of the drive to order that is its ostensible aim. *A Sentimental Journey* trains these energies on the world of social relations, purified by travel of the familiarity

of a common culture, and locates the social as such not in any particular account of society but in the irresistible desire to make sense of the accidental composition of situations in which we encounter other people. Tristram and Yorick do not so much fall short of making sense of their experience as demand a kind of control and coherence that real life does not allow. In reflecting on their failures and the irrationality of their pursuit of order, Sterne's fiction acknowledges, without comprehending, contingency's dominion over the world outside the text.[14]

I.

A Sentimental Journey is built on the premise that social experience is legible. In episode after episode, Yorick describes, analyzes, interprets, and reflects on his meetings with other people as he negotiates unfamiliar social worlds and comically familiar amorous intrigues. The novel does not so much combine travel and sentiment as call attention to how the absence of a shared language or culture demands a more immediate means of communication; the goal of sentimental exchange is the unmediated transmission of feeling. This ideal transparency is at the heart of Yorick's celebrated apostrophe to sensibility, in which he rejects the notion that claims of fellow feeling are "mere pomp of words" in favor of the belief that all sympathy has its source in the human soul (82). Traveling through Bourbonnais festivals in the wake of his meeting with the unfortunate Maria of Moulines, Yorick identifies sensibility as the common source of all human feeling: "Dear sensibility! source inexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows! . . . eternal fountain of our feelings! . . . all comes from thee, great—great SENSORIUM of the world!" (277–78).

Common feelings, however, do not necessarily entail shared understanding, and universal sensibility is of no benefit to the Sentimental Traveller, as Yorick denominates himself, if he cannot communicate with those whose emotions he shares—including, as the author of his own story, the readers for whom he is writing. A solution to this problem emerges in the idea that gestures and glances can be read even more easily than words:

> There is not a secret so aiding to the progress of sociality, as to get master of this *short hand*, and be quick in rendering the several turns of looks and limbs, with all their inflections and delineations, into plain words. For my own part, by long habitude, I do it so mechanically, that when I walk the streets of London, I go

> translating all the way; and have more than once stood behind in the circle, where not three words have been said, and have brought off twenty different dialogues with me, which I could have fairly wrote down and sworn to.
>
> (171–72)

Yorick's theory of translation overcomes linguistic difference. In claiming that he can translate "the several turns of looks and limbs," he posits the existence of a gestural language that is more fundamental, because more natural, than English or French. On this account, gestures are not inessential supplements to spoken language. Instead, their "inflections and delineations," which Yorick is capable of rendering in "plain words," carry a superabundance of meaning (as he suggests when he observes that a nearly dumb show on a London street, translated by a practiced observer, yields "twenty different dialogues"). The chapter in which this passage appears, titled "The Translation," describes Yorick's encounter with an old French officer in a box at the Paris opera. When Yorick enters the box, the officer removes his spectacles and closes his book. "Translate this into any civilized language in the world—," Yorick claims, and the meaning of the officer's greeting is clear (171). Yorick first interprets the gesture—"Here's a poor stranger come in to the box—he seems as if he knew no body; and is never likely, was he to be seven years in Paris, if every man he comes near keeps his spectacles upon his nose—'tis shutting the door of conversation absolutely in his face—and using him worse than a German"—and then concludes, "The French officer might as well have said it all aloud" (171). His translation is offered as proof of his theory, and he remarks that as easily as he has put the officer's gestures into English, he could "put the bow I made him into French too" (171).

The idea of translation is at once central to *A Sentimental Journey* and surprisingly difficult to define. David Fairer calls Yorick's practice "sentimental translation" and emphasizes its significance to the sentimental novel as a genre. "Sensitive to the nuances of facial expressions or physical gesture," Fairer writes, "the 'man of feeling' was an expert reader of physiognomy, a translator of signs who could turn a look into a sentence, the slightest movement into an assertion, a question, or an invitation."[15] Commenting on Yorick's account of the shorthand of gesture, John Mullan claims that sentimental narrative is itself a form of translation: it "has to translate, has to make 'plain words' mediate the natural articulacy of feeling," and it serves "the progress of sociality" by establishing a relationship "not so much . . .

between the narrator and those whose 'looks and limbs' he describes" as "between the narrator and those who read, those who are to benefit by the habit and art of his translation."[16] Fairer and Mullan both explore problems with the language of feeling. As Fairer points out, "Sentimental translation is dependent upon a basic difficulty inherent in the notion of bodily expression itself: its reliance upon the ability to connect matter and idea."[17] Mullan argues that translation is not a transparent process but "a matter of inference and induction—a freedom that comes with the acceptance of error."[18] Sterne is equally attuned to the power and the limitations of this practice of interpretation. In both *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*, gestures are just as likely to be sources of confusion as clear communication; body language is sometimes wholly transparent, as Yorick claims, but at other times it is problematically opaque, as his misadventures on the continent and Tristram's dilated descriptions of physical postures and attitudes repeatedly prove. If Yorick and Tristram's attempts to read others often fail (becoming the object of ironic reflection), Sterne's interest in gestural language has to do with the distance, and the oscillation, between the claims made for its efficacy and the novelistic potential of its failure.

Sentimental translation ostensibly aims to solve the problem of communication, but Yorick's initial account is already riven with equivocations. When he recommends getting "master of this *short hand*," for instance, he would seem to refer to the "rendering . . . of looks and limbs . . . into plain words." But his interpretation of the French officer's movements also intimates that gesture itself is a kind of shorthand, that simple physical motions are capable of conveying complex meanings. Yorick's reading of the scene, moreover, translates it in two senses. When he walks "the streets of London," Yorick is in the habit of "translating all the way"; in Paris, he is "*translating* French looks and attitudes into plain English" (261). This double translation of "French looks and attitudes" into English allows the traveler to overcome the "boundaries and fences" created by a foreign language and culture. According to Yorick, "from the want of languages, connections, and dependencies, and from the difference in education, customs and habits, we lie under so many impediments in communicating our sensations out of our own sphere, as often amount to a total impossibility" (78). Because "the balance of sentimental commerce is always against the expatriated adventurer: he must buy what he has little occasion for at their own price—his conversation will seldom be taken in exchange for theirs without a large

discount" (78), translating "French looks" into "plain English" aids "the progress of sociality" by enabling communication in the absence of a common language. Rather than selling at a discount and buying at a premium, the language of gesture creates the possibility of fair trade in sentiment.

Thus, in addition to surmounting linguistic and cultural differences, translating gestures and glances into words can overcome the limitations of language itself because the system of communication articulated by looks and limbs is more profound than any natural language. As Yorick puts it, "There are certain combined looks of simple subtlety—where whim, and sense, and seriousness, and nonsense, are so blended, that all the languages of Babel set loose together could not express them—they are communicated and caught so instantaneously, that you can scarce say which party is the infecter" (168). He follows this account of the eloquence of gestures with the claim that he will "leave it to your men of words to swell pages about it" (168), and eighteenth-century men of letters did in fact have much to say on the subject. Perhaps the best account of the significance of the nonverbal expression of feeling appears in Henry Home, Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762):

> The natural signs of emotions, voluntary and involuntary, being nearly the same in all men, form an universal language; which no distance of place, no difference of tribe, no diversity of tongue, can darken or render doubtful: even education, tho' of mighty influence, hath not power to vary nor sophisticate, far less to destroy, their signification. This is a wise appointment of Providence: for if these signs were, like words, arbitrary and variable, the thoughts and volitions of strangers would be entirely hid from us; which would prove a great or rather invincible obstruction to the formation of societies: but as matters are ordered, the external appearances of joy, grief, anger, fear, shame, and of the other passions, forming an universal language, open a direct avenue to the heart. As the arbitrary signs vary in every country, there could be no communication of thoughts among different nations, were it not for the natural signs, in which all agree: and as the discovering passions instantly at their birth, is essential to our well-being, and often necessary for self-preservation, the author of our nature, attentive to our wants, hath provided a passage to the heart, which never can be obstructed while eye-sight remains.[19]

According to Kames, the power of gestures derives from their status as "natural signs" that are recognized by all, rather than conventional language,

comprised of "arbitrary and variable" words. (The distinction recalls Steve Martin's warning to those traveling to Paris: "Chapeau means hat. Oeuf means egg. It's like those French have a different word for everything.") The meanings inscribed in gestures are immune to differences in "place," "tribe," "tongue," or "education," and this universal communicability and comprehensibility is evidence of providential design. God has provided for our "well-being" and "self-preservation" by equipping us all with the capacity to make and read gestures which "open a direct avenue to the heart." Without these natural signs, Kames argues, "the thoughts and volitions of strangers would be entirely hid from us," and society itself would be impossible.

Yorick's understanding of gestures works along the lines articulated by Kames, and *A Sentimental Journey* seems to argue that "inflections and delineations" of "looks and limbs" and the particular form of "simple subtlety" that combines "whim" and "seriousness," "sense" and "nonsense" is the natural domain of the sentimental novel. In addition to his assertion about the expressive refinement of gestures, Yorick's elaborate accounts of his wordless transactions with a catalog of strangers reinforce the importance that Kames attaches to natural signs by emphasizing the ephemerality of nonverbal communication. Without his translations, the gestures he describes would leave no trace, and it is the evanescence of glances and postures that makes them a fit medium for sentimental exchange. We must closely attend to this "*short hand*" because the instantaneousness of looks and gestures frustrates our habitual ways of thinking about communicative causality and agency: it is hard to say which look is the cause and which the effect because gestures communicate as if by contagion. Lacking the durability of the written or spoken word, gestural language is a particularly intimate and intersubjective form of interaction.

Yorick's account of his meeting with "the beautiful Grisset" (168), into whose shop he turns for directions to the Opera Comique, exemplifies the sense in which looks and limbs constitute a comprehensive system of communication. The young woman directs him to the opera; she walks him back outside to point the way and "repeated her instructions three times over" (162). But it is her "*tones and manners*," rather than her words, that convince him that she is "really interested that I should not lose myself" (162). The interest disclosed by her manner draws him into a more intimate exchange. He loses himself in her: first, in the street (because he is "thinking more of a woman, than of her good advice" [163]); then, after her invitation, as he

feels her pulse; and, finally, as they stand together over a parcel of gloves on the narrow counter between them. Yorick follows the beautiful Grisset's gaze as it moves from "the gloves, then sideways to the window, then at the gloves—and then at me" (168). Her looks, like her careful instructions about how to get to the Opera Comique and her offer of her wrist, are coquettish expressions of her desire; Yorick's corresponding glances—"at the gloves, then to the window, then at the gloves, and then at her—and so on alternately" (168)—express his for her. Sterne's focus throughout is on the space between the two figures and on the capacity of sensibility to traverse it. The encounter takes place over the counter that divides them; the glances that reveal their mutual attraction move from the gloves to the window to each other's eyes; and the entire scene is framed by Yorick's entrances and exits, movements that underscore the scene's interplay between proximity and distance. Even as he holds her wrist and feels her pulse, the evidence that his touch provides of her "good nature" is indirect (164).[20] The scene is composed of words, of course, but Sterne is careful to give the impression that its significance emerges out of our reading of these actions rather than Yorick's narration. The implications of the exchange with the beautiful Grisset are clear enough, but they depend upon our recognition of the superiority of what their movements mean to what the text says. The circuit created by their reciprocal looks is a reflection of their shared desire and, at the same time, its consummation.[21]

The picture of nonverbal communication created in scenes like these—and *A Sentimental Journey* is largely composed of such scenes—makes Yorick's reference to Babel look particularly strange. To say of "looks of simple subtlety" that "all the languages of Babel set loose together could not express them" suggests that gestural language is in fact far too rich to reduce into plain words (168). In Yorick's encounter with the beautiful Grisset (and the monk, Mons. Dessein, the Madame de L***, the fille de chambre, etc.), it is as though gestures are rendered not into words but into feeling itself—a practice that would appear to undermine Yorick's claims about translation. Of course, the idea that gestures are full of meaning, that they express more than words can say, is a commonplace. Yorick's encounters dramatize this point by calling attention to the sheer number of words required to translate even the smallest gestures. Fifty-eight are required to capture the sense of the French officer's acknowledgement of Yorick's appearance in the box at the opera; explaining the significance of Yorick's bow takes fourteen more.

If the meaning of these gestures is so obvious and so unequivocal, words are at best an inefficient vehicle for their expression.

Yorick's allusion to "the languages of Babel" seems designed to underscore the expressive power of gesture by claiming that the entirety of the world's linguistic resources cannot capture the meaning of subtle looks. But the figure is too potent to serve the purpose he intends. Babel does not merely signify abundance; it means disorder. The word derives from the Hebrew for "jumble" or "confusion," and the Genesis story insists that "the languages of Babel" refer not merely to linguistic diversity but to the obstacles to understanding created by the confusion of tongues. The story of Babel is about human ambition and divine punishment. In the generations following the Great Flood, "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" (11:1), and this univocality inspires the newly settled people to aspire "to make us a name" by building "a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven" (11:4). God responds by confounding the people's language "that they may not understand one another's speech" (11:7) and scattering them "upon the face of all the earth" (11:8). In a sense, the Babel narrative is the inverse of that of the flood (or, as Josephus argued in the *Antiquities of the Jews*, an admission that the flood had failed to serve its intended purpose), and Sterne alludes to it in a way that highlights the ambivalence at the center of the understanding of gesture that Yorick shares with Kames. The flood reverses the work of creation, giving mankind a fresh start; the confusion of tongues undoes the work of undoing by casting mankind forward into the chaos of a truly mortal existence. In invoking Babel, Sterne conjures up the compounded conjectural history of cultural difference and linguistic disorder that at once motivates and complicates the idea of gesture as a sort of ideal language.

In extending and contesting this account of gesture and language, *A Sentimental Journey* recalls a range of eccentric attempts to discover or create a universal language and reflects on the longstanding desire to return to an original, Adamic language that would reverse the disorder that followed mankind's "second Fall."[22] In the seventeenth century, such language theorists as John Wilkins, whose *Essay towards a Real Character, And a Philosophical Language* (1668) is the most notable of numerous universal language systems, aspired to "make amends to mankind for what their pride lost them at the tower of Babel."[23] As Jorge Luis Borges described it, Wilkins's aspiration was to create a language "in which each word defines itself."[24] Like the universal

language theorists, Yorick's aim is to overcome barriers to communication, including those imposed by language itself, and, like such enlightenment thinkers as Leibnitz, Descartes, Condillac, Diderot, and Rousseau, he turns to gesture to conceptualize language. This is the attempt to understand writing as presence that Derrida deconstructs in "Signature Event Context," where the central example of an argument for "the representational character of the written communication—writing as picture, reproduction, imitation of its context"—is Condillac's *Essay on the Origins of Human Knowledge* (1746).[25] Condillac aspires to provide a "general history of writing [that] proceeds by simple gradation from the state of painting to that of the letter"; the modern alphabet is a simplification and "succinct abbreviation" of Egyptian hieroglyphics and Chinese characters.[26] Condillac's history of writing thus describes the same process as the histories of language promulgated by universal language theorists like Wilkins. They differ in that, for Condillac, the movement from gesture to speech to writing is progressive; for Wilkins and other universal language theorists, it describes the history of a fall from an Adamic ideal of universal communication.

Sterne does not take a place in this history or stake out a position in the debate; he transforms it into a novel. On the one hand, in putting words in the service of gestures, the stenographic system Yorick describes promises an unmediated language of feeling and suggests that translating this unspoken language is the project of sentimental travel. On the other hand, *A Sentimental Journey* doesn't teach the art of translation. Rather, it points out that we do it all the time, as a matter of course; "rendering the several turns of looks and limbs, with all their inflections and delineations, into plain words" is less a special skill than a fact of everyday life. Yorick claims to have mastered "this *short hand*," but in making the practice a habit and a mechanical reflex and in finding evidence of gestural language at every turn, he also generalizes it. At the same time, though, he offers little real hope of mastery. His encounters are invariably equivocal: again and again, we must take his word for it that his exchanges with others are sentimental (rather than solipsistic or carnal) because the scenes themselves are open to conflicting interpretations. In presenting sentimental translation as a feature of everyday life, while simultaneously calling attention to its failures and susceptibility to error, Sterne departs from the language theorists and the philosophes by emphasizing the shared tendency of language and gesture to fall short of the dream of transparent communication.

II.

In *Tristram Shandy*, the translation of gesture takes a different form than in *A Sentimental Journey*. Unlike Yorick, Tristram does not go "translating all the way." Instead, his most striking readings of "looks and limbs" focus on postures, as he works to depict the physical attitudes that accompany or anticipate feeling, thought, and speech. Yet *Tristram Shandy*'s detailed descriptions of physical poses and attitudes still resemble *A Sentimental Journey*'s accounts of bodies in motion and interactions between people—both reflect a conviction that gestures say more than mere words can express. Just as Yorick's accounts of his social interactions reflect a belief in the translatability of sentiment while at the same time raising critical questions about the process, Tristram's descriptions of postures—motivated by the conviction that appearances are both meaningful and legible, and that words require the supplement of gestural language to be perfectly intelligible—end up undermining the basis for the belief that underwrites them. In *Tristram Shandy*, detailed depictions of poses and physical attitudes come to function as self-consuming artifacts.[27]

In his seminal essay on *Tristram Shandy*, Viktor Shklovsky claims that "Sterne was the first to introduce the description of poses into the novel; moreover, the poses are very strangely represented—more precisely, they are *made strange*."[28] Like Sterne's manipulation of plot through interruption, digression, and the "time-shift," Shklovsky argues, his "method" of describing postures is designed to call attention to novelistic artifice.[29] Shklovsky is broadly concerned with how Sterne "seems to manipulate and expose the novel's very structure," and the significance of his claim about poses in the novel is formal rather than literary-historical—it doesn't really matter to him that Sterne is the first novelist to pay such careful attention to poses.[30] Instead, Shklovsky is concerned with how, in Sterne, "formal devices and structural relations made perceptible by violating their ordinary employment make up the very content of the novel" such that "the work's content becomes the perception of form."[31] Sterne's attention to physical description is just one of the devices he uses to lay bare the formal workings of novelistic narrative, and, while representations of physical postures might appear to operate on a different principle than manipulations of narrative structure (their ostensible aim, after all, is to allow us to visualize his verbal descriptions), making poses strange in fact intensifies "the perception of form." Rather than distancing

us from real life by rearranging the relationship between cause and effect—the primary aim of the "time-shift"—depictions of poses in Sterne achieve their alienation effect through the pursuit of a defamiliarizing hyperreality.

Tristram Shandy's iconic pose is Tristram's description of Trim as he prepares to deliver Yorick's sermon "Abuses of Conscience" in volume 2 (the sermon originally delivered by Sterne in York in 1750 and printed shortly thereafter). This is the scene Sterne chose when he requested a frontispiece from William Hogarth for the second edition of the novel, and in a letter to Richard Berenger (who had offered to help in his appeal to Hogarth), he remarked, "The loosest Sketch in Nature of Trim reading the Sermon to my Father &c; w^{d} do the Business—& it w^{d} mutually illustrate his System and mine—."[32] Hogarth's "System" had already made an appearance in *Tristram Shandy*. Following Tristram's description of Dr. Slop—"Imagine to yourself a little, squat, uncourtly figure of a Doctor *Slop*, of about four feet and a half perpendicular height, with a breadth of back, and a sesquipedality of belly, which might have done honour to a Serjeant in the Horse-Guards"—he refers to Hogarth's aesthetic theory: "Such were the out-lines of Dr. *Slop*'s figure, which,—if you have read *Hogarth*'s analysis of beauty, and if you have no, I wish you would;—you must know, may as certainly be caracatur'd, and convey'd to the mind by three strokes as three hundred" (2.9.93). Slop is no beauty, but Tristram follows Hogarth in suggesting that his sketch provides an outline that readers can easily fill in.

The description of Trim works along different lines—where the sketch of Dr. Slop is suggestive, the depiction of Trim is exhaustive—and Tristram introduces it by explaining why Trim's posture is important:

> —But before the Corporal begins, I must first give you a description of his attitude;—otherwise he will naturally stand represented, by your imagination, in an uneasy posture,—stiff,—perpendicular,—dividing the weight of his body equally upon both legs;—his eye fixed, as if on duty;—his look determined,—clinching the sermon in his left hand like his firelock:—In a word, you would be apt to paint Trim, as if he was standing in his platoon ready for action:—His attitude was as unlike all this as you can conceive.
>
> (2.17.106–7)

Here the reader's imagination is not to be trusted. Were we given an outline and invited to complete it, Tristram suggests, we would arrive at a misleading picture. Having cleared away the reader's preconceived ideas, he sets

about the work of description: "He stood before them with his body swayed, and bent forwards just so far, as to make an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon;—which sound orators, to whom I address this, know very well, to be the true persuasive angle of incidence" (2.17.107). He enumerates the position of Trim's right leg, "firm under him, sustaining seven-eighths of his whole weight"; his left foot, "advanced a little,—not laterally, nor forwards, but in a line betwixt them"; and his knee, "bent, but that not violently,—but so as to fall within the limits of the line of beauty,—and I add, of the line of science too,—for consider, it had one-eighth part of his body to bear up" (2.17.107). "So much for Corporal Trim's body and legs," Tristram says, turning his attention to how Trim holds the text he is about to read: "He held the sermon loosely,—not carelessly, in his left hand, raised something above his stomach, and detached a little from his breast—his right arm falling negligently by his side, as nature and the laws of gravity order'd it" (2.17.108). Finally, he remarks that "*Trim*'s eyes and the muscles of his face were in full harmony with the other parts of him" and concludes that "he looked frank,—unconstrained,—something assured,—but not bordering upon assurance" (2.17.108).

The overall effect of the description—and of the many twists, turns, explanations, and qualifications I have elided—is, of course, parodic. As Tristram works to create an accurate portrait of Trim, his drive for precision gets in the way of the very clarity that is his goal. He wants his reader "to take the picture of him in at one view" (2.17.107), but he says too much; we can't possibly keep all of these details in mind at once. Even if we could, it is not at all clear what good it would do or how it would help us to better understand the sermon (unless we happen to be among those "sound orators" who know "85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon . . . to be the true persuasive angle of incidence" [2.17.107]). Tristram himself seems to admit as much when he wonders how Trim has struck such a perfect pose:

> How the duce Corporal Trim, who knew not so much as an acute angle from an obtuse one, came to hit it so exactly;—or whether it was chance or nature, or good sense or imitation, &c. shall be commented upon in that part of this cyclopaedia of arts and sciences, where the instrumental parts of the eloquence of the senate, the pulpit, the bar, the coffee-house, the bedchamber, and fire-side, fall under consideration.
>
> (2.17.107)

A page later, he adds, "Let not the critic ask how Corporal Trim could come by all this; I've told him it shall be explained" (2.17.108). In effect, by the time Trim begins the sermon, Tristram's description has cancelled itself out. His insistence on leaving nothing to the imagination makes the image of Trim into a comic version of Savage's self-defeating actions. What does it mean, for example, to say that Trim looks "something assured,—but not bordering upon assurance"?

In approaching Trim as might a painter, a sculptor, or the author of an oratorical treatise, Tristram makes a mockery of contemporary theories about how to represent "the passions by their outward visible or audible signs."[33] In its descriptive set pieces, *Tristram Shandy* draws on the representational conventions of the visual arts and of oratory, but, as Mullan points out, Sterne does not aspire to "pictorial immediacy."[34] Instead, he calls into question the conventions he employs. William V. Holtz suggests that the picture of Trim is a skeptical response to the idea that artistic representation can be reduced to a rule or set of principles, arguing that Sterne pushes "the pictorial metaphor as a model for verbal structures" to its breaking point: "His technique verges on parody by virtue of its extreme movement towards the pictorial ideal. Detail is piled upon detail as Tristram makes discrimination after subtle discrimination, and the whole approaches unintelligibility."[35] As a result, it becomes difficult to take the extravagant claims Tristram makes about such descriptions seriously, and the descriptions themselves come to exemplify their own failure. This skepticism about Tristram's aims appears all the more justified when we discover that it corresponds with one of Sir Walter's pet theories. "There is . . . a certain mien and motion of the body and all its parts, both in acting and speaking, which argues a man *well within*," Walter claims in explaining his criteria for selecting Tristram's tutor. "There are a thousand unnoticed openings . . . which let a penetrating eye at once into a man's soul; and . . . a man of sense does not lay down his hat in coming into a room,—or take it up in going out of it, but something escapes, which discovers him" (6.5.373–74). Walter's general statement of principle is quickly followed by an absurdly long list of movements, gestures, actions, and habits that would disqualify a potential tutor, ranging from lisping, squinting, or winking to biting his lips, grinding his teeth, picking his nose or blowing it to walking fast or slow, folding his arms, hanging them down, or hiding them in his pockets—"nor (according to *Erasmus*)," he concludes, "shall he speak to anyone in making water" or "point to carrion or excre-

ment" (6.5.374). Sir Walter's version of the idea that gestures say more than words goes further than Tristram's (and it's clear from the beginning that it is presented less for our scrutiny than for our ridicule), but both Tristram's descriptions and Sir Walter's elaboration of his theory demonstrate that too many words can undermine the descriptive aim they are intended to serve. Or, as Uncle Toby puts it after Walter has finished, "Now this is all nonsense again" (6.5.374).

On the one hand, Toby's mockery is justified; his brother has clearly gone too far. On the other hand, however, elsewhere in the novel the idea that gestures—Sir Walter's "certain mien and motion of the body and all its parts"—reveal what lies within is taken more seriously. In a particularly complicated scene that bridges the gap between volume 2 and volume 3, for example, Walter becomes increasingly agitated by Toby's repeated attempts to interest Dr. Slop in "what prodigious armies we had in *Flanders*" (2.18.128, 3.1.141). Utterly blind to the situation (Mrs. Shandy, having gone into labor, is upstairs with the midwife) and provoked by Walter's contorted posture as he struggles to reach across his body into his opposite coat-pocket, Toby mounts his hobbyhorse and rings for Trim "to go and fetch his map of Namur, and his compasses and sector along with it, to measure the returning angles of the traverses of that attack,—but particularly of that one, where he received his wound upon his groin" (3.3.144). Tristram describes Walter's response:

> My father knit his brows, and as he knit them, all the blood in his body seemed to rush up into his face—my uncle *Toby* dismounted immediately.
>
> —I did not apprehend your uncle *Toby* was o'horseback.——
>
> (3.3.144)

In this instance, Sir Walter's face accurately reflects his feelings—and, more than that, his expression communicates his displeasure with, and to, his brother far more effectively than words. Walter's body language succeeds where his halting attempts to interrupt Toby's revelry have failed. The interaction prompts Tristram to begin the next chapter with the reflection that "a Man's body and his mind, with utmost reverence to both I speak it, are exactly like a jerkin, and a jerkin's lining;—rumple the one—you rumple the other" (3.4.144). This proposition at once mocks the scene and articulates the logic that governs it: Toby's monomania agitates Sir Walter's mind, mental agitation is manifested on the body, and the body communicates what

speech cannot.[36] In this sense, Walter's worry that Tristram's tutor will be his model—"the mirror in which he is to view himself from morning to night, and by which he is to adjust his looks, his carriage, and perhaps the inmost sentiments of his heart" (6.5.373)—is not nonsense at all. It points to a real problem with sentimental translation. Feeling is not only legible on the body, but can be transmitted from one body to another—and these lines of transmission are unpredictable and subject to error. What began as an account of transparent communication comes to look like a description of contagion, as the unexpected and accidental are conveyed as readily as what is intended.

The transmissibility of affect is in an important sense the scene's central issue. Its set piece is Tristram's description of Sir Walter "taking his wig from off his head with his right hand, and with his *left* pulling out a striped *India* handkerchief from his right coat pocket, in order to rub his head, as he argued the point with my uncle *Toby*" (3.2.142), which he first analyzes in detail and then singles out for our the reader's particular notice: "Now, as my father managed this matter,—consider what a devil of a figure my father made of himself" (3.2.143). Tristram's commentary on this figure Walter makes frames it as an example of the power of circumstances:

> Matters of no more seeming consequence in themselves than, *"Whether my father should have taken off his wig with his right hand or with his left,"*—have divided the greatest kingdoms, and made the crowns of the monarchs who governed them to totter upon their heads.—But need I tell you, Sir, that the circumstances with which every thing in this world is begirt, give every thing in this world its size and shape—and by tightening it, or relaxing it, this way or that, make the thing to be, what it is,—great,—little,—good,—bad,—indifferent or not indifferent, just as the case happens.
>
> (3.2.142–43)

Tristram's emphasis on the importance of matters of little seeming consequence almost seems like a proleptic response to the double bind of circumstances Yorick articulates in *A Sentimental Journey*. Because "the circumstances with which every thing in this world is begirt, give every thing in this world its size and shape," Yorick's contention that "no man cares to have his virtues the sport of contingencies" (70) and his admission that he is "governed by circumstances" and "cannot govern them" (209) are less opposing claims than two sides of the same coin.

Having alerted the reader to the scene's significance, Tristram proceeds

to analyze Sir Walter's strange pose by way of what we might think of as a counterfactual ekphrasis:

> As my father's *India* handkerchief was in his right coat pocket, he should by no means have suffered his right hand to have got engaged: on the contrary, instead of taking off his wig with it, as he did, he ought to have committed that entirely to the left; and then, when the natural exigency my father was under of rubbing his head, call'd out for his handkerchief, he would have had nothing in the world to have done, but to have put his right hand into his right coat pocket and taken it out;—which he might have done without any violence, or the least ungraceful twist in any one tendon or muscle of his whole body.
>
> In this case, (unless, indeed, my father had been resolved to make a fool of himself by holding the wig stiff in his left hand—or by making some nonsensical angle or other at his elbow joint, or arm-pit)—his whole attitude had been easy—natural—unforced: *Reynolds* himself, as great and graceful as he paints, might have painted him as he sat.
>
> (3.2.143)

Sir Walter's attitude is of course the opposite of easy and natural; in reaching for his wig with his right hand, he has made a mistake, for which Tristram finds him "much to blame" (3.2.142). Just as Trim's pose as he prepares to deliver the sermon implicitly proves too much for Hogarth's aesthetic theory, Sir Walter's forced posture stands at odds with Joshua Reynolds's painterly practice. Tristram's point in contrasting his picture of Sir Walter with Reynolds's "great and graceful" style is that his father's bodily contortions express his frustration with his brother's obstinacy more eloquently than words. But they also backfire. Rather than admonishing Toby to be quiet, the "transverse zig-zaggery" of Walter's grotesque attempt to reach across his body into his opposite coat pocket reminds Toby of the climactic moment of the siege of Namur, as his forces approached the gate of St. Nicholas (3.2.144). In the larger context of the scene, Tristram's remark about the connection between body and mind applies to both his father's "transverse zig-zaggery" and his uncle's misunderstanding. Sir Walter's contorted pose expresses the agitation of his mind, but it also calls to mind an entirely different set of ideas in Uncle Toby.

The scene is at once a gestural version of the sort of verbal confusion that so often leads to miscommunication in *Tristram Shandy* and a striking picture of what it means to be governed by circumstances. In taking his

father's unnatural posture as his example, Tristram radically expands what counts as a circumstance. If Sir Walter's removing his wig with his right hand rather than his left constitutes a circumstance—and one capable, according to Tristram, of upsetting the governance of "the greatest kingdoms"—circumstances do not only make "every thing in this world . . . what it is": everything in the world is a circumstance. It is the horror of this circumstantial view that fuels Sir Walter's passion for systems. His desire to make "every thing" conform to his preconceived ideas and to overcome chance by appealing to authority is at once his method and his madness. As Tristram puts it in characterizing his father's ideas about the importance of Christian names, "He was serious;—he was all uniformity;—he was systematical, and, like all systematick reasoners, he would move both heaven and earth, and twist and torture every thing in nature to support his hypothesis" (1.19.49). Removing his wig from his head with his right hand while reaching into his coat pocket with his left hardly seems to qualify as a "hypothesis," but the way the gesture causes Sir Walter to "twist and torture" his body transforms bodily movement into a powerful figure for the irrationality and the pervasiveness of systematic reasoning. The errancy of the effect that Sir Walter's contortions have on Toby, moreover, shows how one person's hypotheses become another's circumstances.

III.

Jonathan Lamb has recommended that we "think of Sterne's narratives as an unstable series of seized initiatives, designed not for interpretive symmetry but for local practical advantages in the engagement with the reader."[37] Along these lines, he argues that Walter Shandy "is conceived as the occasion for a variety of satirical attacks on rigid principles of reasoning and belief whose validity is simply assumed, never tried."[38] Extending Lamb's insight in light of Tristram's account of his father's "transverse zig-zaggery," we might regard Sir Walter himself as less a character in the traditional sense and more an occasion or circumstance in Sterne's expanded sense. He is an instance of character defined by contingent situations rather than embodied experience or psychological depth.[39] Uncle Toby is another obvious example of this kind of character, and Tristram too—even though he seemingly stands outside his father and uncle's disagreements and misunderstandings and enjoys a sort of objectivity produced by the reader's necessary assumption of his perspective—falls prey to the family tendency to "twist and tor-

ture every thing . . . to fit his hypothesis." Tristram's hobbyhorse is emblematized in his descriptions of Trim and Sir Walter, which are motivated by his conviction that language is capable of absolute precision, that words can get to the bottom of things. This belief in the power of words fuels Tristram's digressions from the beginning and prevents him from arriving at his own birth until the third volume of his life story. In his commitment to the idea that the waywardness of his narrative is the measure of its truth to life, Tristram is animated by the same laws that govern Sir Walter and Uncle Toby. Like their hobbyhorses, Tristram's storytelling also conforms to "the nature of a hypothesis": "It assimilates every thing to itself as proper nourishment; and, from the first moment of your begetting it, it generally grows the stronger by every thing you see, hear, read, or understand" (2.19.134).

In its preoccupation with tracing connections between actions and delineating their unforeseen consequences, *A Sentimental Journey* follows *Tristram Shandy* in exploring an expanded conception of circumstantiality. The chains of sentimental exchanges Yorick narrates reflect both the seemingly ungovernable circulation of feeling and the desire to give it a determinate shape, control it, and set it to order. La Fleur presents flowers to his mistress; she immediately gives them "to one of the Count's footmen—the footman to a young sempstress—and the young sempstress to a fiddler" (256); and all the while the bouquet of flowers carries with it two sheets of the fragmentary old French manuscript Yorick has been up all night translating. When Yorick tells La Fleur, "Our misfortunes were involved together" (256), he ostensibly (and humorously) identifies his own loss of the fragment with his servant's disappointment in love. As is so often the case in *Tristram Shandy*, however, Yorick and La Fleur are at cross-purposes; their shared feeling—"I gave a sigh—and La Fleur echo'd it back again to my ear" (256)—is in fact more chance correspondence than true commonality. From a broader perspective on the situation, however, the connection between the accident that delivers the fragment of the French romance to Yorick (it is printed on the scrap of waste paper La Fleur uses to hold "the little print of butter upon a currant leaf" he brings for his master's breakfast [250]) and the roles played by the footman, seamstress, and fiddler in La Fleur's failed love affair do not so much diminish this moment of fellow feeling between master and servant as expand it to include multiple contexts and actors.[40] This expansion of feeling is given special emphasis when objects and animals become involved in networks of sentimental exchange: Yorick gives his snuff-box as

a "peace-offering" to the monk he has "used . . . unkindly" (99); the captive starling, whose complaint—"I can't get out—I can't get out"—interrupts Yorick's soliloquy on self-reliance (197), is given by Yorick to Lord A, who then "gave him to Lord B—Lord B made a present of him to Lord C—and Lord C's gentleman sold him to Lord D's for a shilling—Lord D gave him to Lord E—and so on—half round the alphabet . . ." (204–5). Snuff box and starling; Yorick and LaFleur; Tristram, Walter, and Toby; and Richard Savage, too—all are caught up in webs of connections that extend outward, seemingly indefinitely, leaving their points of origin and the prospect of stable meanings far behind.[41]

That Sterne's characters' plans inevitably go awry—that, like Savage, they seem to be unable to effect their intentions—does not mean that his fiction is finally merely a celebration of indeterminacy. Melvyn New argued against this view more than twenty-five years ago in a polemical critique of poststructuralist readings of Sterne. New claimed that taking *Tristram Shandy* "as a prime illustration of disruptive, fragmented, open, disjunctive narrative" blinds us to the sense in which "its narrative, while pretending to suspend judgment about itself (to remain muddle), simultaneously reminds us of the impossibility of reading without judgment; we are unable to refrain from seeking the definitive statement of what is *clear* about the work."[42] "The pattern of indeterminacy being put to rest by one means or another is," he argued, "as prevalent in *Tristram Shandy* as the opposing tendency, undeniably present, of shattering certainties into fragments of ambivalence and belief."[43] New acknowledges Sterne's interest in narrative and "the 'art' of story-telling," but he focuses on what *Tristram Shandy* is about, and his response to the critical focus on indeterminacy is to emphasize Sterne's commitment to "the reality of his documentation."[44]

Some of the best work on *A Sentimental Journey* makes New's point more powerfully precisely because it fails to follow through on its claims about the novel's resistance to order. Lamb, for example, has read *A Sentimental Journey* as an increasingly elaborate exercise in classification and definition. In his preface, Yorick delineates the different types of travelers with "Linnaean rigor," but defining sentiment is a more difficult task, and Lamb makes a powerful case that Sterne dispenses with the attempt to fix the meaning of the term and instead explores the potentially limitless ways in which circumstances affect sentimental exchange.[45] The closest Sterne gets to defining sentiment, Lamb suggests, is Walter Shandy's observation that "love, you

see, is not so much a SENTIMENT as a SITUATION, into which a man enters, as my brother Toby would do, into a corps—no matter whether he loves the service or no—being once in it—he acts as if he did; and takes every step to shew himself a man of prowesse" (8.34.535). Rather than fixing meaning, Lamb argues, Sir Walter's aphorism introduces circumstances that multiply it indefinitely: "There is no nominal essence to be had, just combinations of ideas of substances."[46] In developing this claim, however, Lamb displays a "Linnaean rigor" of his own. Situation is presented as a principled refusal of definition and an assertion of the necessity of reading particular sets of circumstances, but it becomes an "idiom" that can be analyzed and broken down with the precision of grammatical declension.[47] James Chandler's *An Archaeology of Sympathy*, which identifies Sterne as the origin of the sentimental mode in modern literature and film, elaborates a similarly nuanced critical terminology to capture the elusive ordering strategies of Sterne's fiction. "For all the apparent idiosyncrasy and contingency of Sterne's procedures," Chandler argues, "he was decidedly a pioneer of a new disposition, of new structuring principles for narrative art," and the literature of sensibility was "not just about new kinds and levels of feeling, but also about new ways of ordering works and organizing the worlds represented in them."[48] In these accounts, the pressure of critical scrutiny resolves contingency into complexity.

If we were required to reduce the stories Yorick tells to a single moral, we might regard them as exempla concerning the effects of circumstances. He discovers, over and over again, the difficulty of making sense of seemingly random events and encounters. Like Toby Shandy's frustration calculating the trajectory of a cannonball, the episodes that make up *A Sentimental Journey* testify to the long odds of rendering actions and interactions in plain words. But the task the Sentimental Traveller sets himself is even more perplexing than that of the geometer, the autobiographer, the system builder, or perhaps even the physicist because the actors in his experiment are not projectiles or billiard balls; they are people. I allude here to the physicist Michael Berry's illustration of the staggering complexity of calculating the effects of force and motion on inanimate objects in closed systems, which I discussed in the introduction, and also to Nassim Taleb's observation that Berry's "billiard-ball story assumes a plain and simple world; it does not even take into account these crazy social matters possibly endowed with free will. Billiard balls do not have a mind of their own."[49] Free will or no, the kind of disorder with which Yorick contends eludes every attempt to master it. The

difference between the Madame de L*** and the Marquesina di F*** (and, as their emblematic surnames suggest, between love and the physical consummation of desire) perhaps results from nothing more than the different circumstances in which Yorick chances upon them.

A Sentimental Journey ends with another episode that equivocates between accepted forms and carnal desires. Traveling through Savoy to Turin, a storm and a blocked mountain pass oblige Yorick to share his room in an overbooked inn with a lady and her maid. He has been delayed on his journey by one set of circumstances; the storm and the inn subject him to another. Faced with the impropriety of sleeping in beds "in one and the same room . . . so very close to each other as only to allow space for a small wicker chair betwixt them" (287), Yorick and the lady address their situation by negotiating a set of stipulations "in form and manner a treaty of peace" (288). As a matter of course, the treaty fails (it was made to be broken). They argue, and the lady's maid, hearing their raised voices, creeps out of the closet in which she has been sleeping and in between the two beds. Yorick stretches out his hand, catches "hold of the Fille de Chambre's"—and, with "END OF VOL. II.," the novel ends (291). This bedroom farce is another instance of the novel's many sexual innuendoes, and, as with Yorick's flirtation with the Parisian fille de chambre in "The Temptation" and "The Conquest," it breaks off at the moment it threatens to become explicit. But in this final scene the fall into carnality is animated by Yorick and the lady's absurd attempt to take control of the situation in which they find themselves. It concludes with a gesture that, in seeking one end but finding another, embodies error and chance.

A Sentimental Journey's fragmentary conclusion has elicited intense scrutiny since the novel's publication. In an otherwise laudatory review, the editor of the *Monthly Review*, Ralph Griffiths, regarded the ending as an unfortunate (textual) effect of Sterne's untimely death: "A ludicrous *hiatus* ends the book: which the whimsical Writer has scarce closed before the fatal *hiatus* of DEATH put at once a final period to the ramblings and writings of the inimitable LAURENCE STERNE, to whom we must now bid eternal adieu!"[50] Several of Sterne's contemporaries took the opportunity afforded by the fragmentary ending to take up the narrative where he left off, producing continuations of Yorick's journey, and scholars have long debated both the textual status and the meaning of the novel's lack of "a final period."[51] That *A Sentimental Journey* simply breaks off rather than reaching a more

formally satisfying conclusion puts a dramatic end to Yorick's fruitless attempts to escape contingency. But while the ending of the novel leaves us wondering about the precise coordinates of the line that divides the text from what lies beyond it, that line nevertheless exists, and uncertainty is not contingency. This is not so much Sterne's point as the enabling condition of his fiction—and, perhaps, as Shklovsky suggests when he calls *Tristram Shandy* "the most typical novel of world literature," of all fiction.[52]

Chapter 3

From Map to Network in *Humphry Clinker*

> But after all that has been said by others, or can be said here, no Description of Great Britain can be, what we call a finished Account, as no Cloaths can be made to fit a growing Child; no Picture carry the Likeness of a living Face; the Size of one, and the Countenance of the other always altering with Time, so no Account of a Kingdom thus Daily altering its Countenance, can be Perfect.
>
> —Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*

In "On the English Novelists," the sixth of his *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819), William Hazlitt claims that *Humphry Clinker* is "perhaps . . . the most pleasant gossiping novel that ever was written. . . . It is quite as amusing as going the journey could have been; and we have just as good an idea of what happened on the road as if we had been of the party."[1] Hazlitt begins his lecture by praising novels in general for their "close imitation of men and manners." "If poetry has 'something more divine in it,'" he suggests, the novel "savours more of humanity."[2] Such claims about the novel are of course entirely conventional, but Hazlitt's estimation of the novel's particular appeal also reflects its more recent incarnation as "a record of past manners and opinions." In novels, he says, "we see the very web and texture of society as it really exists, and as we meet with it when we come into the world." To exemplify the genre's capacity for representing society, Hazlitt claims that he "should be at a loss where to find . . . so satisfactory an account of the general state of society, and of moral, political, and religious feeling in the reign of George II. as we meet with in the Adventures of Jo-

seph Andrews and his friend Mr. Abraham Adams." Fielding's novel, he concludes, is "a perfect piece of statistics in its kind."[3]

The idea of the novel as a statistical representation of society is a dramatic departure from Sterne's conception of the form as a vehicle for analyzing "the progress of sociality."[4] While *A Sentimental Journey* employs the conventions of the travel narrative to frame Yorick's tour, as its title suggests, its focus throughout is on the interpersonal dimensions of the situations and incidents it depicts. As Bruno Latour argues, society is an abstraction that refers to a thing.[5] Sociality, by contrast (and as in Latour's sociology), describes a form of relation. Hazlitt approximates this distinction when, on the one hand, he refers to the novel as "a record of past manners and opinions" and, on the other, points to its capacity to capture "the very web and texture of society." This chapter examines the tension between conceiving of the novel as both a documentary account and a means of representing society as a structure. I argue that, like *Joseph Andrews*, *Humphry Clinker* is also a "piece of statistics." But Smollett departs from what Hazlitt means by the term when he applies it to Fielding, and it is my aim to describe the kind of statistical analysis *Humphry Clinker* might be understood to perform.

The word "statistics" was imported into Great Britain from Germany in the 1770s. In its native country and its original sense, it described a nascent science devoted to analyzing the political arrangements of modern states. Hazlitt's use of the term in "On the English Novelists" reflects its English adaptation, in which statistics came to refer more generally to "a view or survey of any kingdom, county, or parish."[6] *Joseph Andrews* is for Hazlitt "a perfect piece of statistics" because it offers a slice of life or representative survey of the "manners and opinions" of Hanoverian society. Readers and critics have long understood Smollett to have aspired to fashion a similarly comprehensive picture of society. This assessment reflects the accumulative dimension of Smollett's aesthetic; his novels are full of lists, catalogues, and indexes of various aspects of eighteenth-century society. But Hazlitt's remarks about *Humphry Clinker* also suggest a different way of thinking about the novel's connection with statistics. His characterization of the novel in terms of its coordination of the communication of information ("gossiping" about "what happened on the road") and travel ("going the journey") suggests that it is more than a "gold mine of cultural information."[7] In addition to offering a vivid portrait of mid-eighteenth-century British society, *Hum-*

phry Clinker frames this account in terms of contemporary systems of transportation and communication. In plotting his narrative on a map of Britain and casting it in epistolary form, Smollett challenges the idea that the novelistic representation of society amounts to a descriptive view or demographic account. Hazlitt uses the words "web" and "texture" to explain how a novel like *Joseph Andrews* captures the "feeling" of society at a particular moment in time. In *Humphry Clinker*, by contrast, Smollett explores what it means to conceive of society as a web of connections or a texture of relationships. The novel's survey is a picture of society constructed in the service of an attempt to depict the networks of social relations that compose it.

Like Sterne's use of the travel journal in *A Sentimental Journey*, Smollett's effort in *Humphry Clinker* to arrive at a conception of society as a network outstrips the empiricism of its generic models. Part picaresque, part travel literature, part epistolary novel, Smollett's novel is finally greater than the sum of its parts. While the literary forms he employs look to experience as the ground of the social reality they represent, *Humphry Clinker* emphasizes formal schemes of organization that coordinate rather than comprehend experience, and its account of society is predicated on its abstraction. *Humphry Clinker* is greater than the sum of its parts, in other words, because the use it makes of the picaresque, travel literature, and epistolary form is more than a nod in the direction of the representational strategies of realism. Instead, Smollett's generic experimentation constitutes an attempt to rethink novelistic representation from the outside in. The novel's depiction of the various social worlds its characters encounter mobilizes the "formal realism" that Ian Watt so powerfully described as the genre's defining feature, but it does so in a way that challenges its premises. Rather than offering "a full and authentic report of human experience," in *Humphry Clinker* individuals are often treated as abstractions, as if they were data points or connecting nodes rather than real people.[8] Their significance has less to do with an increasingly complex interiority—Smollett's characters are notoriously flat—than how they are arranged and positioned in a range of groups, classes, crowds, and routes. This extrinsic approach constitutes Smollett's sociological imagination. *Humphry Clinker* is not so much a novel in Watt's sense as an inquiry into the social arrangements that structure the world the novel sought to represent. Its innovation is to transform the novel into a vehicle for sociological analysis via a different kind of realistic representation.

To this end, in *Humphry Clinker* Smollett superimposes a communica-

tion network onto the map of his characters' travels. He does so in part, as recent critics of the novel have suggested, to present a picture of British society capable of addressing the anxieties about commercial modernity and social mobility that the novel raises. In a powerful sense, however, the move from map to network exploits the generic resources of novelistic representation in a way that runs counter to our traditional understanding of the novel's development. Smollett figures hardly at all in Watt's and Michael McKeon's accounts of the rise or origins of the novel.[9] This is in part a matter of periodization; Watt and McKeon focus on Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding because they came first. But it also reflects Smollett's distance from the main line of the English novel. Smollett's apparent indifference to "the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience," I argue, reflects an interest in the influence of social systems and an attendant skepticism about the explanatory power of a conception of society as the aggregate of its members' experiences.[10] What have habitually been seen as Smollett's deficiencies as a novelist—flat characters, episodic plots, and a preference for satire and romance at the expense of realism—are in fact key features of an approach to novelistic representation that emphasizes the systems and schemes that organize social relations rather than the "narrative embodiment" of individual experience.[11] The shift from understanding social organization on the model of the map to that of the network in turn transforms the formal unit out of which the epistolary novel is built. Letters, in *Humphry Clinker*, are as much formal markers of social connections as expressions of personal identity. Smollett's letters do not surrender their communicative function but, recast in terms of the communication networks that facilitate their circulation, become in addition vehicles for conceptualizing the impersonal structures that coordinate individuals into social groups. Throughout the novel, Smollett works to conceive of society in terms of its form as well as its content. In this sense, *Humphry Clinker* is social theory before the social.

I.

Humphry Clinker's plot, or its lack thereof, identifies it as a picaresque novel. Its episodic narrative, which follows the Welsh landowner Matthew Bramble and his family as they travel through Wales, England, and Scotland, serves largely as a vehicle for social commentary and satire. But if Humphry Clinker gives the book its title and its neat resolution (when he is revealed

to be Bramble's illegitimate son), he is more bit player than true picaro. In *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, and *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, the picaro is the central figure around whom the otherwise centrifugal action of the plot circulates. In *Humphry Clinker*, by contrast, Clinker's appearance nearly a third of the way into the book marks his ancillary status—and announces a departure from Smollett's prior practice.[12] This dislocation of the picaro from the story's center to its margins makes it clear that, while the picaresque reflects the heterogeneity and capaciousness of *Humphry Clinker*'s vision of society, the genre serves as a horizon of possibility rather than a principle of narrative structure.

Smollett's title is instructive in this regard as well. In contrast to *The Adventures of . . . Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, and *Ferdinand Count Fathom*, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* emphasizes the journey as much as its experiential significance for the hero—and Smollett's displacement of the empty center normally held by the picaro expands the possibilities of picaresque satire by distributing the picaro's function among all of his characters.[13] Of course, Smollett's title also reflects the contemporary popularity of the travel narrative, and the group's itinerary affords ample opportunity for satiric observations on British life and manners.[14] Critics have paid close attention to both Smollett's commentary on the regional differences that distinguish the English, Scottish, and Welsh and his acid portraits of the excesses of commercial society. On the surface, these concerns seem to cut in different directions. On the one hand, the novel's regional satire articulates a comparative analysis of the British nation, in which Wales represents a healthy ideal, England the depraved product of modernization, and Scotland an uneven mixture of virtues and vices (it is primitive and backward, but sometimes admirably so). On the other hand, Bramble's twin anxieties about contagion and the indiscriminate mixing of social classes constitute a thoroughgoing critique of modern commerce and social life. "The general tide of luxury" that Bramble fears is sweeping away all social distinctions would also appear to erase the national differences on which the novel's regional satire depends.[15]

Criticism of the novel divides along roughly these lines. In general, early commentators focused on regional differences and the value judgments they entail, debating, for example, whether, or to what extent, *Humphry Clinker* was Smollett's brief in defense of his native Scotland.[16] More recently, scholars have emphasized the novel's critique of commercialization and argued

that Smollett's real concern was the eighteenth century's project of establishing England's "idea of itself as a coherent, homogeneous society."[17] These approaches differ in significant ways, but each conceptualizes the novel's expedition in terms of a map. Earlier critics read *Humphry Clinker* as Smollett's attempt to police the cultural boundaries dividing one national group from another; recent critics have understood it as Smollett's condemnation of the commercial modernity that threatened to make such differences irrelevant or his ambivalent account of the forging of a coherent national identity. On either reading, travel does what we expect travel to do: it broadens horizons, for better and (more often in this case) for worse; it affords new sights, sounds, and (as every reader of Smollett knows) smells; it opens the way for encounters with new people and new groups of people. In these terms, the argument between the old and new critics of *Humphry Clinker* depends to a large extent on how the map on which the novel unfolds is drawn. Are we to understand it as a map of Wales, England, and Scotland—or a map of Great Britain?

The relevance of the map to *Humphry Clinker* is obvious enough. The standard scholarly and teaching texts of the novel include maps that indicate the route Bramble and his party travel—in this sense, the narrative develops on the map.[18] The maps included in these editions resemble those offered by Franco Moretti in the first chapter of his *Atlas of the European Novel*. Like Moretti's maps, the map of *Humphry Clinker*'s expedition delineates the novel's settings and plot; it is a "(geographical) elaboration" of "(narrative) elements."[19] By his own account, Moretti's method is primarily to approach novels in the aggregate; with respect to individual novels, his readings tend to reflect and amplify what we already know rather than arriving at radically new interpretations. Mapping, it turns out, depends upon prior reading. Moretti's selection of "variables" prompts interpretive questions—"which characters should I map? which narrative moments? which elements of the context?"—that in turn reveal the sense in which "geography is inseparable from a morphology."[20] This is less a criticism of Moretti's method, however, than an observation that what it discloses is a recursive relationship between novelistic structure and meaning.[21] But the method does produce a certain blindness. Moretti never imagines that the novels he maps might themselves be engaged in a form of sociohistorical analysis that in significant ways anticipates his own.

The insight that underwrites Moretti's project—that a map is "a connec-

tion made visible"—also informed Edward Said's influential approach to the novel in *Culture and Imperialism*.[22] "After Lukács and Proust," Said observed, "we have become so accustomed to thinking of the novel's plot and structure as constituted by temporality that we have overlooked the function of space, geography, and location."[23] For Said, mapping becomes a powerful tool for symptomatic reading. Austen's *Mansfield Park* thus turns on the interdependence of Fanny's "domestic or small-scale movement in space" and "the larger, more openly colonial movements of Sir Thomas," and his reading of the novel works "to discern . . . a counterpoint between overt patterns in British writings about Britain and representations of the world beyond the British Isles."[24] Following Said (as well as Raymond Williams), Michael Rosenblum has suggested that we might understand the historical significance of *Humphry Clinker*, and its conception of domestic as well as colonial space, in terms of the novel's alignment of "movements within a narrative field with the movements of history."[25] Rosenblum argues that, "seen from afar, as if from a satellite in space," England "becomes a great game board on which we can trace the movements of individuals or armies; if we back off further we see that the board extends to Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and further yet, to the outposts of Empire. Seen close up, the movements of Robinson, Tom, or Clarissa seem spontaneous and idiosyncratic, but from a distance they abstractly choreograph the essential movements of the culture."[26]

For Rosenblum, the governing trope of movement in *Humphry Clinker* is the tour, and, as for Said and Moretti, the significance of characters' "spontaneous and idiosyncratic" movements becomes legible when they are plotted on a map. While mapping is clearly important to the novel, I want to suggest that the map is the wrong rubric with which to understand travel in *Humphry Clinker*. At the very least, it tells only part of the story. It is true, of course, that the development of the narrative can be plotted on a map. But this map must be understood also in terms of movements that it does not record—not only the expedition of Bramble and his extended family but also the lines traced by their letters. This is to say that the novel's plot must be understood alongside its epistolary form. All but one of the letters in *Humphry Clinker* are sent by the various travelers to friends back at home, reporting on their adventures and the new places they encounter. The novel's epistolarity thus has the effect of doubling the episodic character of the picaresque novel. In reporting on "what happened on the road," moreover, the letter writers' movements are linked to fixed—and known—points on a

preexisting plan: Bramble writes to his doctor, Richard Lewis, back at home in Wales; Tabby writes to Dr. Lewis and to the servants at Brambleton Hall (mainly to complain about her brother's management of the estate while he's away); Win writes to her fellow servants at the hall (mainly to complain about Tabby); Jery writes sarcastic letters to a friend still at Oxford; and Liddy writes earnest letters to a boarding-school friend in Gloucester.[27] The novel does not merely track characters as they move around on the map of Great Britain. Instead, their forward movement is shadowed by the recursive trajectories of their letters, describing a communication network composed of a branching web of nodes and links. The movement of the mail inscribes the tour within a more abstract collection of connections. The network described by the novel's letters is more than a mere reflection of the plot; it points to a dimension of Smollett's project that is predicated on the novel form of connection that the network reveals. If mapping *Humphry Clinker* offers insight into the novel's connection to "the movements of history," attending to these intertwined networks of transportation and communication points to the limitations of thinking about novelistic structure in terms of "space, geography, and location" and reveals the sense in which "morphology" might escape "geography."[28]

II.

The impression that *Humphry Clinker*'s goal is to paint a comprehensive picture of contemporary society is particularly strong in the novel's early descriptions of Bath and London. In these episodes, "the web and texture of society as it really exists" takes the shape of what Bramble calls "the vortex of the tumult" (52). Filtered through Bramble's hypochondriacal hypersensitivity—his letters are litanies of physical and psychological complaints, and his nephew, Jery, describes him as "tender as a man without a skin; who cannot bear the slightest touch without flinching" (49)—Bath appears as "a monster" in the shape of a mob (36).[29] Its "general mixture of all degrees assembled in our public rooms, without distinction of rank or fortune"—which for Jery "is a source of infinite amusement" (49) and for Liddy constitutes "a new world" (39)—is, for Bramble, "a monstrous jumble of heterogeneous principles; a vile mob of noise and impertinence, without decency or subordination" (49). Indeed, his contempt for the mob, made clear enough in his violent entrée into Bath society, is reinforced by the attempt to distinguish it into its constituent parts. Bramble's claim that "the mob is

a monster I never could abide, either in its head, tail, midriff, or members; I detest the whole of it, as a mass of ignorance, presumption, malice, and brutality" (37) ignores the fact that, were it possible distinguish the crowd into its component parts, the problem it poses would be resolved.

This insistence on seeing the mob as a body permeates the novel's descriptions of Bath, which not only detail the assaults on the senses committed by what is ostensibly a health resort but ultimately trace the most egregious (and most disgusting) of its offenses to the very forms of circulation that are Bath's reason for being. Early on, Bramble is alarmed by the sight of "a child full of scrophulous ulcers, carried in the arms of one of his guides, under the very notice of the bathers." "Suppose the matter of those ulcers," he asks, "floating on the water, comes in contact with my skin, when the pores are all open, I would ask you what must be the consequence?" (45). Bramble's horrific image renders Jery's figurative appraisal of his uncle "as a man without a skin" in bodily terms, offering contagion as a physiological correlative for sympathetic identification.[30] After fainting at a ball, Bramble unleashes an indictment of Bath's polite society that employs the same metaphor. The assembly is a "horrid assault" that overpowers Bramble's "nerves," "*a compound of villainous smells*, in which the most violent stinks, and the most powerful perfumes, contended for the mastery" (65–66). The description of "the stench of the crowd" immediately recalls his prior analysis of the baths themselves, and the connection establishes an analogy between the circulation of the spa waters and the social circulation that sustains the resort (67). The "pestilential vapours" of the ball are the product of mixing, both literal and figurative, which makes it impossible to distinguish or to resist. In each case, Bramble's objection has to do with the self's involuntary exposure to others. If those who bathe in and drink the waters run the risk of contamination by others' afflictions, simply appearing in public is to court the same danger. On Bramble's account, both forms of circulation are governed by the same model of contagion.

In moving from Bath to London, Bramble and his company (which now includes Clinker, added to the group on the road to London) arrive at the source of the evils encountered in Bath. Bramble is impressed by London's new building projects, but his assessment of the city reproduces his account of Bath, both in its conclusions and its metaphorical structure: "The capital is become an overgrown monster; which, like a dropsical head, will in time

leave the body and extremities without nourishment and support." This growth has come at the expense of the countryside—Bramble remarks that it is no "wonder that our villages are depopulated, and our farms in want of day-labourers" (87)—and the comparison of country and city accordingly assumes an increasingly powerful role in his letters. The primary intensification of Bramble's critique of modernity, however, is a function of London's scope and diversity. In their focus on the excesses of polite society, the Bath letters diagnose a condition that seems irrelevant to the mundane details of daily life. The overwhelming impression given by the London letters, by contrast, is of the welter of everyday life itself. The following brilliant passage might stand for the whole:

> In short, there is no distinction or subordination left—The different departments of life are jumbled together—The hodcarrier, the low mechanic, the tapster, the publican, the shopkeeper, the pettifogger, the citizen, and courtier, *all tread upon the kibes of one another*: actuated by the demons of profligacy and licentiousness, they are seen every where rambling, riding, rolling, rushing, justling, mixing, bouncing, cracking, and crashing in one vile ferment of stupidity and corruption—All is tumult and hurry; one would imagine that they were impelled by some disorder of the brain, that would not suffer them to be at rest. (88)

Bramble attributes the breakdown of social distinctions to "the grand source of luxury and corruption" (87). While he objects to the social climbing he sees everywhere he looks in London—the "fashionable figures; which, upon inquiry, will be found to be journeymen taylors, serving-men, and abigails, disguised like their betters"—the deeper problem with display that looks like disguise is the way it undermines the very distinctions it would assume (88).[31] In London, the middle ranks, which everyone aspires to leave, increasingly resemble the depopulated countryside. If the danger in Bath is infection, the threat that Bramble discerns in London's social mobility is that social hierarchy and, ultimately, the distinctions that define both individuals and parts of the nation are in danger disappearing altogether.

Bramble's critiques of class mixing and commerce converge in his description of a Covent Garden fruit seller:

> It was but yesterday that I saw a dirty barrow-bunter in the street, cleaning her dusty fruit with her own spittle; and, who knows but some fine lady of St. James's

> parish might admit into her delicate mouth those very cherries, which had been rolled and moistened between the ulcerated chops of a St. Giles huckster.
>
> (122)

Like all of Bramble's sensational accounts of Bath and London, the first effect of the passage is shock. But we shouldn't allow the grossness of the scene to obscure the logic that structures it. Bramble's indictment of the unwholesomeness of London food is a commentary on the circulation of both goods and people in the metropolis. The mob is drawn to London to satisfy its "vanity, ambition, and childish curiosity; which cannot be gratified, but in the *busy haunts of men*: but, in the course of this gratification, their very organs of sense are perverted, and they become habitually lost to every relish of what is genuine and excellent in its own nature" (118). The cherries that move from the fruit seller's mouth to the fine lady's are at once evidence of this perverted taste and of the systems of circulation that have developed to satisfy it. In themselves a product of nature, the cherries are out of season and out of place, and the transaction that brings them to the fine lady is more than commercial. The barrow-bunter's "spittle" marks the connection between them—a lurid and sexualized trace of an otherwise invisible relationship. The effect is transgressive, as Bramble's outraged reaction makes clear, but, unlike the class mixing he has described previously, it doesn't so much level the distinction between the fruit seller and the fine lady as suggest that commerce has made such leveling beside the point. What is most striking about this connection is that it is unknown to either party, invisible, and pervasive. More than an exceptional instance, the open-mouthed kiss, mediated by a cherry, between a barrow-bunter and a fine lady is the condition of modern social life. London has become a "centre of infection" because the leading principle of social connection is contagion (118).[32]

A similar anxiety about social contagion pervades Frances Burney's *Evelina*. Evelina's worries are generically appropriate to "the history of a young lady's entrance into the world"; in large part, they are the apprehensions of "a simple rustic . . . whose ignorance of the world makes her perpetually fear doing something wrong!"[33] In this sense, Evelina resembles countless romance heroines, whose development depends on their constant correction.[34] She learns, too (although how much is open to debate), but she is also subjected to a kind of wrongdoing that is the product of modern city life. *Evelina* is full of crowds, and while its heroine's response to the bustle of

London is closer to Liddy Melford's than Matthew Bramble's, Burney is particularly attuned to the dangers that the metropolis poses for an unprotected young women. Out one evening in Marybone Gardens, Evelina is separated from her party. Lost "in the midst of a crowd, yet without party, friend, or acquaintance," she walks along,

> in disordered haste, from place to place, without knowing which way to turn, or whither I went. Every other moment I was spoken to by some bold and unfeeling man; to whom my distress, which I think must be very apparent, only furnished a pretence for impertinent witticism, or free gallantry.
>
> (218)

To escape the unwanted attentions of "a young officer," who, "with great violence, . . . seized [her] hand," Evelina appeals to "two ladies" for protection (218), only to discover "to [her] inexpressible horror" that she "had sought protection from insult, of those who were themselves most likely to offer it!" (219). The danger of appearing in public with two prostitutes is greater, it appears, than the violence of the young officer—perhaps because, as Evelina soon learns, they are more difficult to get rid of than the men who accosted her in the crowd. After reuniting with her friends, the "unhappy women listened to all that was said with a kind of callous curiosity, and seemed determined not to take any hint" (220). Finally, announcing that they have decided to join the party, they "very boldly" take Evelina's arm and "seized that of Mr. Brown" (220). "And this was our situation," she writes, "—for we had not taken three steps, when,—O Sir,—we again met Lord Orville!" (220).

Evelina's account of her situation emphasizes the potential damage to her reputation, especially in Lord Orville's eyes—"What, what can he think of this adventure! How strangely, how cruelly have all appearances turned against me!" (222)—and Susan Staves has convincingly dismantled an old critical consensus that such " 'Female Difficulties' . . . are difficulties created out of nothing."[35] Staves argues that the scene in Marybone Gardens objectifies Evelina's anxiety about her reputation and dramatizes the novel's threats to her delicacy, claiming, "The real tension in *Evelina* lies between the heroine's struggle to preserve her delicacy under these extraordinarily difficult circumstances and the multitude of comic characters who constantly threaten it."[36] According to Staves, Madame Duval, Captain Mirvan, the Broughtons, and the novel's other comic characters realize Evelina's anxieties by committing the wrongs she constantly fears—and, what is worse,

their errors become hers because of her close connection to them.[37] Evelina's age, gender, and dependent condition all complicate her situation; she is unable to deny her membership in groups she has not chosen and of which she would form no part.[38] Her appearance arm in arm with the two prostitutes in Marybone Gardens sensationalizes this kind of guilt by association, but it also demonstrates how the "tumult and hurry" of the city intensifies the principle of connection that underwrites it.[39] In *Evelina*, as in *Humphry Clinker*, mere proximity threatens to erode the distinctions between persons on which social order depends.

This shared anxiety about disorder suggests why it is that several of *Humphry Clinker*'s London episodes seem designed to test a range of approaches to making sense of the mass and managing the threat of untrammeled connection that it poses. Bramble's forays into politics and literature, for example, each offer the promise of a smaller society of initiates as a bulwark against the anonymity and confusion of the mob. These worlds within worlds would appear to represent the possibility of governing what seems an ungovernable society—whether by means of political organization or literary representation. At the very least, they might stand as counterexamples to the monstrosity of the crowd. This aspiration clearly fuels Bramble's patronage of "the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts," but his hopes are tempered by skepticism. "My uncle is extremely fond of this institution," Jery writes, "which will certainly be productive of great advantages to the public, if, from its democratical form, it does not degenerate into cabal and corruption" (115). Bramble's fears are well founded, as the literary world is defined by jealousy and infighting. Even Smollett's own appearance in the novel serves to confirm the degenerate character of the metropolis. His charitable support of "all unfortunate brothers of the quill" (124)—which brings together such "various" "nations and dialects" that their "conversation resembled the confusion of tongues at Babel" (126), a modest, private attempt to create an island of social harmony—is repaid with abuse. In the end, politics and literature both descend into favoritism and factionalism—and prove equally incapable of maintaining or reestablishing social order.

The group's expedition to the North is explicitly framed as an attempt to cure the ills encountered in Bath and London, and the first glimmer of a possible solution appears on the road in Jery's letter from Harrigate, another spa town. The social world Jery describes is not plagued by crowds, which is a welcome change, but Harrigate's difference from London and Bath

goes deeper than that. His account focuses not on the number of people but the arrangement of space and distribution of the town's small tourist population: "Most of the company lodge . . . in five separate inns, situated in different parts of the commons, from whence they go every morning to the well, in their own carriages. The lodgers of each inn form a distinct society, that eat together, and there is a commodious public room, where they breakfast in disabille, at separate tables" (161). According to Jery, "Harrigate treads upon the heels of Bath, in the articles of gaiety and dissipation—with this difference, however, that here we are more sociable and familiar," and this improvement of society seems to reflect a better system of management. Not only do the guests at each inn "form a distinct society," but their entertainments, while effectively public, are privately arranged. The result is that "the company is more agreeable than one could expect from an accidental assemblage of persons, who are utter strangers to one another." In one sense, this comment marks the distance that separates Harrigate from London and Bath. In those cities, the "accidental assemblage of . . . utter strangers" describes the problem of the mob and of modern society more generally. But the difference in Harrigate, which produces "a general disposition . . . to maintain good-fellowship, and promote the purposes of humanity," has to do with the specific character of the "assemblage" (161).

Harrigate society enjoys the advantage of fewer people, but they are still strangers accidentally thrown together. To this extent, it poses the same problems that make London and Bath unbearable, and it must be acknowledged that Bramble's negative assessment of Harrigate undercuts Jery's appraisal. (Bramble describes Harrigate as "a wild common, bare and bleak, without tree or shrub, or the least signs of cultivation . . . where there is neither space, air, nor convenience." Because he stops at Harrigate solely "to satisfy [his] curiosity," however, and cannot account for its popularity "upon any other principle but that of caprice, which seems to be the character of our nation," his assessment would seem to say as much about his own implication in the predicament he identifies as the resort's deficiencies [162]). While the party's subsequent adventures on the road are not devoid of conflict and interpersonal strife, they seem manageable in a way that conflict and strife in Bath and London, at once overwhelming and the essential condition of everyday life, are not. This difference discloses the role that distance itself plays in the novel's quest for social harmony: distance both from the metropolis and its satellites and between people or groups of people. In

London, Bramble objects to "the participation of the vulgar" who "now thrust themselves into all assemblies, from a ridotto at St. James's, to a hop at Rotherhithe" (115). But, as we have seen, these objections on the basis of class are a manifestation of a deeper anxiety about a comprehensive breakdown of distinction and subordination that extends from social interaction to architecture and city planning. Bramble finds both Bath and London "so altered" that he hardly recognizes them (34); reflecting on the building boom in the capital, he writes that "if this infatuation continues for half a century, I suppose the whole county of Middlesex will be covered with brick" (86). Bath in particular stands as an example of the failure of city planning: "One sees new houses starting up in every out-let and every corner . . . contrived without judgment, executed without solidity, and stuck together, with so little regard to plan and propriety, that the different lines of the new rows and buildings interfere with, and intersect one another in every different angle of conjunction" (36).[40] If, in London, "*all tread upon the kibes of one another*" (88), they do so because the modern city makes their careful, and humane, arrangement impossible.

From this standpoint, the expedition to Scotland takes on a changed significance. Scotland's differences from England, to which critics of the novel have paid close attention and have frequently attributed the healing effects of the journey (on Bramble, in particular, but on the other members of the group as well), retain their importance. Scotland's backwardness, the sense in which an expedition to the North is a trip back in time, is an antidote to the threatening modernity of Bath and London. But, construed solely in this way, the inexorable progress of commerce makes the Scottish gambit an exercise in futility. Scotland, too, will become modern. In these terms, and in light of what we know about Smollett's political conservatism, the small victories of *Humphry Clinker* pale in comparison to the deleterious effects of modernization. The return to Wales and to Brambleton Hall is a nostalgic withdrawal from the problems of modernity, and the "improvements" won on the road—Bramble's renewed health, the revelation that Clinker is Bramble's son, and the unions of Tabby and Lismahago, Win and Clinker, and Liddy and George Dennison "in the holy bands of mattermoney"—whatever they mean for the novel's characters, respond to the larger problems the novel has raised with a series of failed allegories (352). The reordering of Bramble's household does not translate into a larger sense of social harmony: Clinker's new situation does not resolve the novel's class critique; Tabby and Lisma-

hago's marriage is not a new, improved act of union; Bramble's health does not signify the health of the nation. These events bring the story to a close, but the formal resolution of the plot makes no claim—and holds out no hope—for the improvement of society. Instead, by concluding with a return that takes the form of a retreat, the novel reinforces rather than resolves the social disorder it has diagnosed, leaving the reader with a sense of dis-ease. (The same can be said of the romance endings of *Evelina* and Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, which do not so much resolve as paper over the danger and disorder the novels have described.)[41] The seriousness of Smollett's social criticism makes it difficult to understand the narrative's conclusion as anything more than a set of imaginary solutions to problems that the novel has made all too real.[42]

But the novel's nostalgia also serves an analytical purpose. Scotland's distance from the metropolis is not merely a retreat or withdrawal; it is a critical distance. As the quasi-colonial periphery to the metropolitan center, Scotland grounds the novel's critical perspective. This distance is cultural but also structural; the affinities between Scottish and Welsh culture reflect their similarities but also, and more importantly, their shared distance from London. This conception of distance, which at once provides perspective and makes similarities visible, is crucial to Smollett's plot. It is the crux of the long episode that recounts the fortunes of Bramble's "old friend Baynard" (285). The story of Baynard's ruin follows an established pattern; it is the last of four instances in which landed estates are destroyed by "extravagance and dissipation" (288). Bramble attributes the fault in each case to "the inflation of female vanity," but more striking than these cautionary tales about the dangers of domestic luxury and "female tyranny" is the novel's interposition of the story of Charles Dennison (father of George Dennison, the erstwhile "Wilson") between those recounting Baynard's ruin and recovery (294).[43] Dennison is a model squire, and it is his example, as much as Bramble's "friendly office" in putting Baynard's affairs in order, that holds out the promise of the restoration of Baynard's estate (340). Baynard and Dennison are presented as doubles: like Baynard, Dennison has lost two children and has "one son only" (328), their stories are interleaved, and their houses are separated by less than thirty miles. But where Baynard was ruled by his wife's excessive desires, Dennison's wife is a true helpmeet, and he goes to extraordinary lengths to maintain his household economy (pretending not to be at home, for example, "when a gay equipage came to my gates"

[327]). After Bramble introduces them, Baynard himself "declares that he never saw the theory of true pleasure reduced to practice before," and his renewal is made possible by this new connection to Dennison (343). But Dennison's practical example speaks just as powerfully to the importance of separation; it is predicated, after all, on the withdrawal of his household from the corrupt society that threatens it. Following it would require a similar withdrawal of Baynard—an effort that, if successful, would stand as a rejection of the idea of a coherent, cohesive society.

If, from this perspective, *Humphry Clinker*'s imagined solutions to the problems it has dramatized are unsatisfying, its representation of these problems points to a different way of understanding the novel's mode of cultural critique. Rather than presenting a conclusive vision of a well-ordered society —a microcosm that might serve as a model for the whole—*Humphry Clinker* offers in its form a means of conceptualizing social organization that cuts against the idea of society as a coherent picture. The invisible link—the spittle—that connects the Covent Garden fruit seller to the fine lady of St. James is a principle of connection, but one that reflects the incoherence and the corrosive effects of the networks of circulation and exchange that constitute commercial society. By contrast, the communication network that links the letter writers to their correspondents is orderly and regular; even the absence of replies emphasizes the structure of the network by deemphasizing the sense that it depends on reciprocity between intimates. As Liddy puts it in a letter to her friend Letty Willis, "This method of writing to you from time to time, without any hopes of an answer . . . is at best a very imperfect enjoyment of friendship, because it admits of no return of confidence and good counsel" (307). "This method of writing," inscribed in all of the novel's letters, takes the form of reportage rather than exchange, even when a letter's contents are intimate.[44] The connection between correspondents is formal rather than affective. In this sense, Smollett offers one new technology as a response to another; the communication network counters the web of invisible connections that makes life in the modern metropolis so incomprehensible.[45]

III.

I claimed at the beginning of this chapter that Smollett's use of letters is a key to *Humphry Clinker*'s statistical imagination and that the novel's epistolary form articulates an understanding of systems of social organization on the model of the network rather than the map. The letter-novel

serves Smollett's purposes as satirist and cultural critic, but, by keeping the format of the epistolary report always before us, it also prevents the expedition—or the map on which it might be traced—from amalgamating the characters it encounters. Whereas maps measure space in terms of contiguity and borders, networks connect distant places while still maintaining the distances that separate them. (The map describes Bramble's horrors of class mixing and the mob; the network, at least potentially, manages them.) Smollett's move from map to network suggests that, for him, epistolary form is as much a way of marking distance as cultivating interiority and of approaching character from the outside in as from the inside out (as, for example, Richardson's use of the form has traditionally been understood). Rather than an expressive form (which reveals character), Smollett's letters trace a network across (and on top of) both map and character. The tension between map and network reveals an analogy between the representational claims of maps and novelistic characters. Both are imagined to be defined by boundaries and their transgression: borders are crossed; Bramble is "tender as a man without a skin." In *Humphry Clinker*, Smollett pits the formal technology of letters against its traditional project of representation by conceptualizing society in terms of communication as well as travel. Characters and places become nodes rather than sites, and the linkage of distant points supplements the crossing of boundaries.

To say that Smollett's characters are nodes or points is another way of describing their flatness. They are types verging on stereotypes: the Welsh squire; the disappointed, ridiculous spinster; the comic maid; the ingénue making her entrance into society; the Oxford dandy; the faithful servant; the Scottish braggart. In *The Economy of Character*, Deidre Lynch highlights the use to which such flat characters were put in understanding the emergent commercial society of late eighteenth-century Britain. The kind of character Smollett conceives in a Peregrine Pickle or Ferdinand Count Fathom, Lynch argues, "is supposed to be the means for producing a sense of social context (rather than the social context counting as a means for producing our sense of a character): this character is the prosthetic device that enables readers to apprehend the comprehensive, impersonal systems that bind them together."[46] In *Humphry Clinker*, however, Smollett rejects the commercial analogy that underwrites Lynch's understanding of impersonal systems. His point is not to understand a society defined by the exchange of goods, which promises to bring people and places closer together and to make them known to each

other (and to themselves) by making them more and more alike. Instead, it is to imagine a form of social organization modeled on the exchange of information. Rather than developing character, the letters that make up *Humphry Clinker* describe a communication network inscribed within the transportation network traced by new post-roads—a literal republic of letters. Moreover, the novel's uneven distribution of information—its multiple accounts of the same episodes and events—frustrates the expectation of a single, reliable source of information even as the novel, as a genre, was moving (albeit unevenly) toward the stability of omniscience. Critics have tended to regard the multiple narration of *Humphry Clinker* as a puzzle, but this effect is more apparent than real. The various letter writers, while they report on the same events from different perspectives, do not produce a *Rashomon* effect, in which their subjective accounts lead us to question the underlying reality. They suggest, instead, the multiplicity of perspectives that contribute to what remains, in an important sense, a common vision.

In this way, *Humphry Clinker* answers to, and perhaps improves upon, the description of the novel that Smollett offered in the dedication to *Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753):

> A Novel is a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groupes, and exhibited in various attitudes, for the purposes of an uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient. But this plan cannot be executed . . . without a principal personage to attract the attention, unite the incidents, unwind the clue of the labyrinth, and at last close the scene by virtue of its own importance.[47]

Humphry Clinker presents "a large diffused picture," with its comprehensive views, but, in taking the network as its "uniform plan," it arrives at this picture without articulating a central principle of organization. As John Barrell has demonstrated, in Smollett's other novels, and *Roderick Random* in particular, the "principal personage" is the landed gentleman, who alone possesses the perspective necessary to execute the novelist's—and the nation's—plan. For Barrell, Bramble is an imperfect version of Roderick Random, and his ability "to offer apparently authoritative judgments on the action of the novel and the society it represents" is merely apparent because he lacks the kind of comprehensive experience earned through "a practical acquaintance with the vicissitudes and varieties of social life" that underwrites Random's

ability to unite the disparate actions of the narrative and the divergent interests of the society it strives to represent.[48]

Barrell is right about Bramble but wrong about *Humphry Clinker*. Smollett's aim in this novel is not to invest the "complete knowledge" of social life Barrell describes in any particular individual; Bramble is less a departure from the civic humanist ideal of the disinterested gentleman than a satiric critique of that ideal.[49] After all, all Britain cannot retire to Brambleton Hall. *Humphry Clinker* departs from *Roderick Random* because it is founded on the claim that the representational project Barrell so convincingly describes is finally a dead end. In place of a picture of society that reflects its "fundamental coherence, comprehensibility, describability," in *Humphry Clinker* Smollett constructs a picture of society that is coordinated rather than coherent.[50] It is closer to the idea of "society as an intricate network of determining social relations and events" that Barrell associates with George Eliot than to the eighteenth-century episodic writers' overriding concern with coherence.[51] When society is imagined as a network, complete knowledge is invested in the system rather than the individuals who constitute it. It is a view that reflects an instrumental epistemology rooted in systems rather than individual experience.

While the republic of letters Smollett envisions in *Humphry Clinker* diminishes the gentleman's role, its goal isn't finally a more democratic society. Smollett's aims are still fundamentally conservative, but his conservatism addresses a new set of problems. In the face of the novel's veritable catalog of failed schemes of social organization, descriptions of urban planning gone awry, and nightmare visions of social connection, even the civic republican ideal of the disinterested man of property cannot "unwind the clue of the labyrinth." Bramble and his group go a journey, and near its end he restores order to one landed estate—as much by an act of mediation (when he puts Baynard in touch with Charles Dennison) as by the force of his abilities or example—and reconstitutes his own household (by discovering a son and marrying off a troublesome sister). Neither of these actions is particularly impressive; Bramble does not close the scene by virtue of his own importance. Instead, Smollett's large diffused picture serves a plan that is general without being uniform.

Seen in this light, the network emerges as a means of comprehending the whole of society *without* organizing it. It responds to the social anxieties

that animate the novel by articulating a conception of society that accommodates both connectedness and separation. British society, *Humphry Clinker* suggests, is poetic in a properly Augustan sense: a kind of discordia concors that, to cite Johnson, turns less on the "discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike" than on "a combination of dissimilar images."[52] The network combines and arranges, without homogenizing, dissimilar images of character, culture, and class and thereby manages populations by denominating them "British" in ways that do not simply erase the differences that distinguish them. If the travelers' expedition itself reflects the threat of union, the distances traveled by their letters hold out the hope that the places about which they have been writing might remain, for a time at least, separate and distinct. But this, too, is a losing proposition; *Humphry Clinker* at least gives us little reason to think otherwise. Like Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, the future it envisions for Britain is depressingly homogeneous (and democratic). But Smollett's more significant achievement is to fashion a perspective from which some measure of order can be wrung from a social world that seems to offer only confusion. He does so by refashioning, even rejecting, the formal realism, predicated on readers' affective, sympathetic identification with characters, that has long been understood to lie at the heart of the project of the novel.

If the network serves Smollett's novelistic plan, it does so finally by articulating a perspective that can be thought but not inhabited. The order achieved at the level of the system does not alter the fact that the same roads that carry the travelers and their letters also enable the commercial exchanges that make the distances that divide people and places increasingly irrelevant. In this sense, the power of the comprehensive but diffused point of view that Smollett discovers in the communication network is every bit as figurative as the allegorical "solutions" to the social problems that the novel diagnoses. The difference that distinguishes them has to do with the analytical purchase that each has on its object. The return to Brambleton Hall and the marriages with which the novel concludes look backward; they represent a retreat from the ills of the modern world and work to manage rather than confront its incursions. The perspective of the network, by contrast, while it fails as a response to the experiential dimension of the threats the novel confronts, establishes a standpoint from which the full measure of the problem might be taken. If, in the end, *Humphry Clinker* can only imagine a return to the past, its conception of the formal structure of social

life stands as an imaginative assertion of the power of critique even in the absence of the capacity to control the change it comprehends. It outlines a critical project for the novel that redirects and supplements its representational ambitions. Rather than offering a description of society in the service of a more complete account of the modern individual, *Humphry Clinker* mobilizes its rudimentary persons and orchestrates their actions in order to animate and render visible the structures that were increasingly thought, and felt, to inform them. It is in this sense, finally, that the novel is "a perfect piece of statistics in its kind."[53]

Chapter 4

Godwin's Handshake

> It has always been the case against the classical citizen that he is at heart a tragic hero, unsafe to associate with, who insists that he is living in the realm of freedom and not that of necessity.
>
> —J. G. A. Pocock, "Virtues, Rights, and Manners"

In *Caleb Williams*, William Godwin's first and most successful novel, the act that generates the narrative, Ferdinando Falkland's murder of his fellow landowner and rival Barnabas Tyrrel, is preceded by a scene that on first sight seems to represent little more than a missed opportunity. Falkland fears that Tyrrel's animosity will lead to bloodshed. "A strife between persons with our particularities and our weaknesses," he says to Tyrrel, "includes consequences that I shudder to think of. I fear, sir, that it is pregnant with death to at least one of us, and with misfortune and remorse to the survivor." To avoid death, misfortune, and remorse, he proposes a "compact" to "preserve mutual peace": "Mr. Falkland offered his hand to Mr. Tyrrel in a token of fellowship. But the gesture was too significant. The wayward rustic, who seemed to have been somewhat impressed by what had preceded, taken as he was by surprise, shrunk back."[1] Falkland's "fine talking" has drawn Tyrrel in; his extended hand drives him away (30). But if Tyrrel's refusal to shake Falkland's hand at first appears to be the product of his irrational anger, it quickly becomes clear that he has reason on his side. Falkland's egalitarian gesture is undermined by his air of superiority: "Even when he was most exemplary, there was an apparent loftiness in his manner that was calculated to irritate; and the very grandeur with which he suppressed his passions, operated indirectly as a taunt to his opponent" (31). Thus his claim of equality—"I

come to you," he tells Tyrrel, "not as a master, but an equal" (30)—is recognized by Tyrrel as nothing more than a thinly veiled assertion of mastery.

Hands are offered twice more in *Caleb Williams*, but none of the novel's three handshakes proves successful. What a successful handshake would mean is suggested by the observation of the cultural historian Herman Roodenburg that

> in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and probably for a good deal of the eighteenth century, shaking hands had a very different meaning from the ritual act we know today. It looks as if the gesture was not part of any greeting or parting behavior at all but that it had quite different connotations which centered around such concepts as friendship, brotherhood, peace, reconciliation, accord, or mutual agreement.[2]

In its several contexts—juridical, diplomatic, commercial—the handshake did not so much assume social equality, as it does today, as effect it. Thus the purpose of the handshake in the eighteenth century was to demystify the issue Godwin raised in an appendix to *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice* entitled "Of Co-operation, Cohabitation and Marriage." "It is a curious subject," Godwin wrote, "to enquire into the due medium between individuality and concert."[3] Shaking hands is a gesture by which individuals acting in concert announce—to each other and to the world—that they have agreed to do so; it is a gesture designed to enact Godwin's "due medium." Hence Tyrrel refuses Falkland's hand not out of spite but because Falkland's condescending manner makes a compact between equals look like a gift that is his to give. Moreover, Tyrrel's fate (he is killed by the hand he will not shake) suggests that, in Godwin's version of the gothic at least, there is no "due medium between individuality and concert."

Caleb Williams has been called the first "psychological" novel. That it turns on a series of failed handshakes, however, looks less like Godwin's attempt to achieve a kind of novelistic realism by making his characters act as real people act than novelistically to render the terms of a political debate in which, with the publication of *Political Justice* one year earlier, he was already engaged. *Caleb Williams* recasts the English debate over the French Revolution not merely by fictionalizing the arguments of *Political Justice* (as Godwin's preface to the novel suggests) or by responding to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (as generations of critics have claimed). Instead, I argue, Godwin's novel calls into question both the conservative

attack on the revolution and the radical defense. The encounter between Falkland and Tyrrel (precipitated by Tyrrel's resentful response to Falkland's "Ode to the Genius of Chivalry") attacks Burke by rejecting his nostalgic account of a bygone "age of chivalry."[4] The second of *Caleb Williams*'s failed handshakes, however, responds not to Burke's *Reflections* but to Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* by denying the revolutionary claim that a return to first principles and natural rights can reverse the ravages of history and custom. *Caleb Williams*'s political argument thus takes the form of a double reversal that pits Burke and Paine against one another but opposes both. Godwin performs this maneuver by focusing on the repeated failure of a socially, and politically, significant gesture and insisting that both conservatism and radicalism are brought up short by the inability of individuals to recognize individuality in others.

The novel's third failed handshake does not arrive at a solution to this political problem. Nor does it propose a synthesis that transcends the conflict. Instead, the strangeness of the final handshake—Caleb discovers that it conceals a bribe—is that it turns out not to be a handshake at all. This final gesture is an empty one, which offers neither reconciliation nor the promise of mutual accord. In emptying the handshake of its meaning (by filling it with money), the gesture complicates a political reading of the novel by radically altering the terms of its political allegory. In the preface to *Caleb Williams*, Godwin claims that novels address "persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach" and that if he "shall have taught a valuable lesson . . . , he will have reason to congratulate himself upon the vehicle he has chosen" (1). In this chapter, I propose that for Godwin the novel is a "vehicle" not merely for reaching a different set of readers but also for advancing a different kind of analysis than that afforded by "books of philosophy and science." By thinking through a series of ordinary yet significant gestures (which both expound plot and elucidate character), *Caleb Williams* moves beyond political allegory and, in so doing, recasts the meaning of that allegory. With the final handshake, Godwin shifts the terms of the novel's critique by shifting its focus from political analysis to social history. The novel's sequence of handshakes traces an episode in the history of manners and points to a historical development, the emergence of commercial society, that complicates the novel's political stance by undermining the conception of politics that underwrites it. In this way, the handshake and its

history allow Godwin to speculate about an emerging, but not yet realized, transformation of politics and sociability.

In the end, *Caleb Williams*'s handshakes do not simply symbolize political positions (despite their obvious allusion to eighteenth-century discourses about the social contract). Godwin's use of the gesture draws on both its symbolic status, which he exploits in offering handshakes as markers of crucial moments in the novel's symbolic economy, and its historical development. In the eighteenth century, the meaning of the handshake was in flux; what had been a ritual gesture "centered around such concepts as friendship, brotherhood, peace, reconciliation, accord, or mutual agreement" was in the process of becoming merely a sign of greeting or parting. The history of the handshake's transformation subtends Godwin's analysis of a historical shift in the forms of association that underwrite social relations. The conventions of novelistic representation—which, his preface indicates, allow "the existing constitution of society" to be "faithfully developed in its practical effects" (1)—afford Godwin the opportunity to move politics to the terrain of gesture and thus not only to diagnose a political impasse but to describe a more profound historical rupture. Just as the handshake's transformation from ritual gesture to neutral symbol of greeting and parting augurs the coming of a more egalitarian society and empties the gesture of its power to effect equality, *Caleb Williams*'s final handshake reflects on the changes that modern commercial society was introducing into a political world conceived in terms of virtue, equality, law, and rights from the perspective of the worldview in eclipse.

I.

The historical origins of the handshake are enigmatic: they are presumed to be widely known, yet are in fact difficult to specify. Casual commentators confidently assert that the handshake originated at some moment in the past when the gesture served to assure each party that the other was not carrying a weapon.[5] In his influential *Principles of Sociology* (1888), Herbert Spencer offered a more fanciful account, describing a greeting, practiced by "polite Arabs," in which "the offer of an inferior to kiss a superior's hand, is resisted by the superior if he is condescending, and . . . the conflict ends by the inferior kissing his own hand to the superior."[6] This imagined scene prompts a question—"Have we not here, then, the origin of shaking

hands? If of two persons each wishes to make an obeisance to the other by kissing his hand, and each out of compliment to the refuses to have his own hand kissed, what will happen?" Spencer argues that the process by which this "irregular" action became "regular and rhythmical" constitutes the origin of the handshake.[7]

Spencer identifies the handshake as a sign of deference. But he emphasizes the development of the gesture, classing it among those "obeisances between equals" that "have resulted by diffusion from obeisances which originally expressed surrender to a conqueror."[8] More recent anthropological approaches to the handshake arrive at similar conclusions. In *Symbols: Private and Public*, Raymond Firth concludes that "status considerations" are "at the core of the symbolism of greeting and parting rituals" and notes that "in Western society of the 'polite order' it was formerly proper to greet servants verbally, but never to shake them by the hand, which would have been an admission of equality."[9] Like Spencer, Firth is particularly interested in how the meaning of the handshake has changed over time:

> Apart from modifications associated with changes of fashion in dress—men who do not wear hats cannot raise them, and must bow or wave a hand instead—what appear to be deeply-rooted modes of behaviour seem able to change quite rapidly. The comparatively recent spread of the Western handshake is a case in point. There is a paradox here. At any one period in any one society conventional forms of greeting and parting tend to be fairly limited, and to be regarded as of aesthetic and moral significance. Failure to give the "correct" signals tends to be criticized, even in children, as insulting to the party affected.[10]

Firth raises two issues that I have already suggested are central to Godwin's use of the handshake in *Caleb Williams*. First, despite its rigidly defined symbolic significance, the meaning of the handshake is not stable but instead given to rapid transformations. Second, because of its rigid symbolic significance, the handshake is a gesture that can go wrong. Handshakes can fail.

What it might mean for a handshake to fail is illuminated by studies of the gesture in the classical world. In *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, Walter Burkert elaborates on the symbolic significance of the gesture in a way that comprehends popular accounts of the handshake's origins: "An agreement can be expressed quickly and clearly in words, but it is only made effective by a ritual gesture: open, weaponless hands stretched out toward one another, grasping each other in a mutual

handshake—a mutual display of aggression sealing what had previously merely been spoken."[11] Understanding the handshake as a form of sublimated aggression suggests that we might regard the gesture as an early example of the kind of behavior studied by Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* (1939). The handshake, however, is not among Elias's "modes of behavior considered typical of Western civilized man," and its omission is instructive.[12] The gesture does not fall within the parameters of *The Civilizing Process* because in its earlier incarnation, as "a ritual gesture," the handshake did not fall within the realm of manners.[13]

The handshake's ceremonial and symbolic status in the ancient world returns us to the account of the gesture I cited at the outset. In a recent study of gestures in ancient Rome, Anthony Corbeill claims that "the hand visually enacts, and ultimately symbolizes, the legal relations that govern commerce, property, and the Roman family."[14] The force of Roodenburg's account lies in its suggestion that the handshake might not merely reflect social relations but enact social equality. Shaking the hand of a servant is dangerous not merely because it is "an admission of equality" but also because the gesture itself might be capable of conferring equality.[15] If we tend not to understand social gestures as performatives in this sense, it is because ours is a less formal, less ceremonial society. It is precisely the performative dimension of the handshake, however, that explains the interest Godwin takes in a gesture that at first glance seems so insignificant.[16] In the late eighteenth century, the handshake was at once perfectly ordinary (or on its way to becoming so) and imbued with residual political significance. From this standpoint, Firth's sense that the handshake, like other gestures of greeting and parting, marks "the arrival or departure of a person from the social scene" is in fact closely tied to the "status considerations at the core of the symbolism of greeting and parting rituals."[17] The "social scene" in the late eighteenth century, in other words, is not merely a place; it comprises the intensely political realm of the status hierarchy itself.

It is in light of the issues raised by the history of the handshake that we should understand Godwin's inquiry into "the due medium between individuality and concert." In an important sense, this relationship is the "curious subject" of *Political Justice* in its entirety, and the conclusion Godwin reaches in the appendix on marriage—"that everything that is usually understood by the term co-operation is, in some degree, an evil"—is its guiding principle. He advises that "all supererogatory co-operation is carefully to be

avoided," including "common labour and common meals."[18] Cohabitation and marriage receive similar treatment, but perhaps the most striking critique of cooperation in *Political Justice* is the argument that "promises are, absolutely considered, an evil, and stand in opposition to the genuine and wholesome exercise of an intellectual nature."[19] Godwin's critique of promises, which he elaborates into a principled rejection of the social contract, radicalizes his case against cooperation by insisting that individuals should avoid even cooperation with their future selves.[20]

From this standpoint, it comes as no surprise that *Caleb Williams* cannot imagine a successful handshake. The gesture's utility from Godwin's perspective as a novelist derives from the sense in which its repeated failure to effect what it promises dramatizes what he regards as the necessary failure of cooperation. In *Caleb Williams*, handshakes fail not because the two parties involved fail to observe the gesture's significance; whether the offered hand is refused or a successfully completed handshake is finally unsuccessful in bringing about the agreement or compact it is intended to effect, handshakes fail precisely because of what they are intended to signify. While we might regard *Caleb Williams*'s failed handshakes as illustrations of Godwin's skepticism about promises between individuals, the history of the handshake—as it is reflected in the novel—emphasizes the social dimension of the agreements and alliances the novel explores.

II.

When Falkland offers Tyrrel his hand, his aim is to effect such an agreement, if not quite an alliance. The reconciliation Falkland envisions at once appeals to Tyrrel's sense of honor and reflects his own adherence to the chivalric code:

> We are in a critical situation. We are upon the brink of a whirlwind which, if once it get hold of us, will render all farther deliberation impotent. An unfortunate jealousy seems to have insinuated itself between us, which I would willingly remove; and I come to ask your assistance. We are both of us nice of temper; we are both apt to kindle, and warm of resentment. Precaution in this stage can be dishonourable to neither; the time may come when we shall wish we had employed it, and find it too late. Why should we be enemies? Our tastes are different; our pursuits need not interfere.
>
> (28–29)

Caleb offers a similar assessment of the feud, describing Tyrell as "a true model of the English squire," devoted to "the science of horseflesh" and well versed "in the arts of shooting, fishing and hunting . . . the theory and practice of boxing, cudgel-play and quarter-staff" (16–17). "This man," Caleb writes, "one might at first have supposed of all others least qualified from instruction, or inclined by the habits of life, to disturb the enjoyments of a mind so richly endowed as that of Mr. Falkland" (16). But Falkland's arrival and ascendancy in the society that Tyrell had ruled "with an inflexible hand" (18) enrages the English squire and fuels his hatred for "this outlandish, foreign-made Englishman" (20). Commenting on this reversal of fortune, Caleb notes, "It is scarcely necessary to remark that the revolution of sentiment in this rural vicinity, belongs to one of the most obvious features of the human mind. The rudest exhibition of an art is at first admired; till a nobler is presented, and we are taught to wonder at the facility with which before we been satisfied" (20–21).[21] The result, he informs the reader, has dire consequences both for the antagonists and for himself: "The feud that sprung up between them was nourished by concurring circumstances, till it attained a magnitude difficult to be paralleled; and, because they regarded each other with a deadly hatred, I have become an object of misery and abhorrence" (19).

That Falkland and Tyrrel's "concurring circumstances" will lead to no good is reinforced by Caleb's account of Falkland's character and, in particular, by the incident from Falkland's past that exemplifies it. Caleb begins his biographical sketch of Falkland by observing that "among the favourite authors of his early years were the heroic poets of Italy. From them he imbibed the love of chivalry and romance." Falkland "conceived that there was in the manners depicted by these celebrated poets, something to imitate, as well as something to avoid," and both the appeal and the danger of this early "model of heroism" are on display in Falkland's "adventures" on the grand tour (10). Taken in by the marquis Pisani at Rome and "received upon a footing of great familiarity" (12), Falkland becomes an intimate of the marquis's daughter and heir, Lucretia Pisani, which leads in turn to a misunderstanding with Count Malvesi, Lucretia's chief suitor. Challenged to a duel by Malvesi, Falkland reconciles him with Lucretia, prompting Malvesi's extravagant apology to "this god-like Englishman." In accepting the apology, Falkland reviews the catastrophe they have narrowly avoided, remarking that "the laws of honor are in the utmost degree rigid, and there was reason to fear that, however anxious I was to be your friend, I might be obliged to be your murderer" (15).

Falkland's Italian interlude clarifies the meaning of his feud with Tyrrel by establishing that the rift between the Italianate English gentleman and the "true model of the English squire" is more than a clash of personalities (16).[22] Just as Falkland figures romance and chivalry, Tyrrel epitomizes time-honored English values. Against Falkland's conviction that "nothing was so well calculated to make men delicate, gallant, and humane, as a temper perpetually alive to the sentiments of birth and honour" (10), Tyrrel maintains that "a nation of such animals [as Falkland] would have no chance with a single regiment of the old English votaries of beef and pudding" (20). In the contrast between Falkland's refinement and gentility and Tyrrel's plainspoken common sense and practical knowledge, Godwin takes aim at Burke's picture of English national character. When in the *Reflections* Burke announces that "the age of chivalry is gone," he is lamenting the extinction of "that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness." His encomium on "this mixed system of opinion and sentiment" captures Falkland's character exactly (hence the critical identification of Falkland and Burke).[23] But Godwin's depiction of Tyrrel, "this rural Antaeus" who "quelled" "all opposition . . . with a high hand" (18), as both tyrant and model squire argues that the social equilibrium Burke had described and had attributed to "the antient chivalry" was in fact merely a romance.[24] If Tyrrel represents a type in decline, his claim to authority is nonetheless real. As Caleb puts it, "The tyranny of Mr. Tyrrel would not have been so patiently endured, had not his colloquial accomplishments perpetually come in aid of the authority which his rank and prowess originally obtained" (18).

Tyrrel stands as a rebuke to Burke. But the opposition between Falkland and Tyrrel, which pits "chivalry and romance" against "beef and pudding," also suggests that identifying Falkland with Burke and Caleb with "Godwin himself in the rebellious act of writing *Political Justice*" misses a crucial dimension of the political allegory of the first two volumes of *Caleb Williams*.[25] As Caleb makes plain, the rift between Falkland and Tyrrel becomes his inheritance, as Falkland's guilt precipitates his persecution of Caleb. But Caleb inherits not only the guilt that torments Falkland after he murders Tyrrel; he also inherits the structural relationship that linked Tyrrel and Falkland. This relationship takes the form of an analogy that elaborates the purpose

Godwin describes in the novel's preface: "to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of single story would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man" (1). Just as Falkland destroys Tyrrel, so Caleb destroys Falkland: Tyrrel's public beating of Falkland transforms Falkland into a tyrant; Falkland's persecution of Caleb makes Caleb Falkland's murderer when, in the published ending of the novel, Caleb's public revelation of Falkland's crime leads to Falkland's death.

Of course, there are differences between Falkland's destruction of Tyrrel and Caleb's of Falkland. For one thing, before he dies, Falkland confesses and forgives Caleb. My aim in identifying this analogy, however, is to elucidate the grounds on which Godwin stages arguments against both counter-revolution and revolution.[26] Falkland's secret murder of Tyrrel, and the failed reconciliation that precipitates it, puts the lie to Burke's age of chivalry. In Caleb's pursuit of that secret, however, Godwin's political allegory encompasses Paine as well as Burke. One of Paine's central contentions in *Rights of Man* is that Burke's *Reflections* transposes causes and effects. "It suits his purpose," Paine writes, "to exhibit the consequences without their causes."[27] For his part, Burke feared that the revolutionaries themselves would attempt to disguise their excesses by just such a confusion of means and ends: "Justifying murder and perfidy for public benefit, public benefit would soon become the pretext, and perfidy and murder the end."[28] Paine's response to Burke's argument is enlightened: he offers a series of genetic narratives of the origins of the revolution to replace what he calls Burke's "tragic" or "horrid paintings."[29] Paine claims that the fall of the Bastille can be understood only when its causes are known—among them that the Bastille itself was in truth a "horrid painting," an image of despotism. Paintings seize the imagination and arrest the intellect; narratives that explain origins point the way to freedom. Paine pursues origins because knowledge of origins constitutes the ground of liberty: "To possess ourselves of a clear idea of what government is, or ought to be, we must trace it to its origin."[30] But in the novel's reversible narrative of pursuit—in volume 2, Caleb pursues Falkland's secret; in volume 3, Falkland pursues Caleb to preserve his reputation—the attempt to trace origins, "to possess ourselves of a clear idea," takes a gothic turn.

Godwin mounts a critique of Paine's originary narratives by means of Caleb's curiosity—his central character trait—and his enlightened inquiry into Falkland's past. In describing his curiosity, "the spring action which, per-

haps more than any other, characterized the whole train of my life," Caleb links rational inquiry with romance reading:

> I was desirous of tracing the variety of effects which might be produced from given causes. It was this that made me a sort of natural philosopher; I could not rest till I had acquainted myself with the solutions that had been invented for the phenomena of the universe. In fine, this produced in me an invincible attachment to books of narrative and romance. I panted for the unravelling of an adventure, with an anxiety, perhaps almost equal to that of the man whose future happiness or misery depended on the issue. I read, I devoured compositions of this sort. They took possession of my soul.
>
> (4)

In *The Spirit of the Age*, William Hazlitt calls Caleb "the very demon of curiosity personified," and in this passage, strangely, natural philosophy leads to love of romance, and both scientific inquiry and romance reading are presented as extensions, even consequences, of innate curiosity.[31] Caleb reads Falkland's past as he reads the romance, but uncovering the cause of his master's melancholy yields no "solutions." He learns of Falkland's sin, but knowledge does not set him free. Instead, it binds him forever to an origin that is not his own, making Falkland's sin his inheritance: in taking possession of Falkland's secret, he becomes possessed by it.[32] Moreover, the lineage that links Caleb to Falkland must be traced ever further back, because, when Caleb finally exposes Falkland as Tyrrel's murderer, he repeats the pattern set by Tyrrel's persecution of Emily Melville. Just as Tyrrel's charges against his cousin lead to her imprisonment and death, so Caleb's accusation of murder forces the confession that kills Falkland. In each case, the charges are legally justified, but, as Caleb realizes only after it is too late, morally unjust; in each case, the death is wrongful.

Such doublings and reversals are the signature and stock-in-trade of the gothic novel.[33] In particular, they shape the family romance of *Frankenstein*: just as Caleb pursues Falkland's secret out of sympathy but in learning it becomes his enemy, so Victor Frankenstein pursues the secret of life only to have the embodiment of that knowledge return to stalk him. But in *Caleb Williams* doubling elaborates not the relationship between creator and created but that between romance and enlightenment. If Ferdinando Falkland's very name identifies him as a figure of romance, Caleb's obsessive need to inquire into origins, to discover the truth behind Falkland's secret, figures enlight-

enment.[34] Caleb's initial desire is to discover the truth in order to relieve Falkland's suffering, if only by offering the comfort of fellowship. In learning that Falkland is indeed a murderer, however, he finds himself trapped in a different kind of relationship. Caleb's knowledge of Falkland's secret cannot undo what has already been done. Moreover, as Falkland and Tyrrel's failed handshake demonstrates, it cannot do what has been left undone. Because Caleb is drawn in where Tyrrel "shrunk back," Caleb cannot escape the grip of Falkland's outstretched hand. By means of Caleb's "inquisitive mind" (3), Godwin radicalizes Paine's claim for the past's connection to the present. Caleb's knowledge of Falkland's past does not yield Paine's "clear idea"; instead, the past holds the present in thrall. In *Caleb Williams*, when the enlightened reader reads the romance, the result is gothic possession.[35] Through this conflation of romance reading and enlightened inquiry—and the assertion that they spring from the same source—Godwin joins his critiques of Burke and Paine.

III.

In *Political Justice*, Godwin set himself against both sides of the revolution debate. Burkean conservatism and Painite radicalism each threaten what he calls "the great cause of humanity."[36] Left to its own devices, Godwin argues, government will wither away, and "the proper method for hastening the decline of error, and producing uniformity of judgment is not, by brute force, by laws, or by imitation; but, on the contrary, by exciting every man to think for himself."[37] "We ought," he concludes, "to be able to do without one another."[38] But in testing this conclusion against "Things as They Are" in *Caleb Williams*, Godwin emphasizes not the perfectibility of individual judgment but the "invincible attachment" that inescapably and involuntarily binds one individual to another. Thus, while the debate between Burke and Paine is largely concerned with the first two terms of the revolutionary trinity, *liberté* and *egalité*, Godwin suggests that it is the third term, *fraternité*, that poses the ultimate threat to political justice.

The novel's second handshake takes up the issue of *fraternité*. Framed by Falkland, tried, convicted, and imprisoned, Caleb's reflections on his situation lead him to Painite conclusions. He begins by mocking English self-satisfaction—"Thank God, exclaims the Englishman, we have no Bastille! Thank God, with us no man can be punished without a crime! Unthinking wretch! Is that a country of liberty where thousands languish in dungeons

and fetters? Go, ignorant fool! and visit the scenes of our prisons!" (181)—and, "looking "around upon [his] walls," concludes with a larger generalization: "This is society. This is the object, the distribution of justice, which is the end of human reason. For this sages have toiled, and the midnight oil has been wasted. This!" (182). Regarding "the whole human species as so many hangmen and torturers" (183), Caleb turns inward, "draw[ing] amusement from the stores of [his] own mind" (185), an exercise in Cartesian reflection that first convinces him that "the mind is master of itself" and then furnishes him with the resources necessary for his escape (188). His imprisonment is a conversion experience: he rejects "the man of artificial society" (187) in favor of the "advantages" of "solitude" (201).

On Caleb's escape, Godwin obliges his protagonist's preference for solitude by plunging him into a forest. Here the novel offers another version of society's primal scene, as Caleb falls in with a band of robbers whose offer of protection seems to represent his salvation from "the whole machine of society" (183). The thieves form a kind of natural society, outside the bounds of law, and their captain, Mr. Raymond, espouses a distinctly Jacobin understanding of his calling. "Our profession is the profession of justice," Raymond says, addressing his "comrades." "We, who are thieves without a license, are at war with another set of men, who are thieves according to law.—A thief is of course a man living among his equals; I do not pretend then to assume any authority among you; act as you think proper" (216). As this brief oration suggests, Raymond's version of honor among thieves appeals not to proverbial wisdom but to revolutionary principles.[39] His response to the one member of the band who opposes Caleb's admission to the group, for example, is to ask, "Do you think we will be your slaves?" (216).

But when Caleb is finally offered entry into the den of thieves—as "a man living among his equals"—he, like Tyrrel, shrinks back. The scene describes an attempt to substitute one kind of contract for another: one of Raymond's men comes upon a handbill advertising a reward for Caleb's return to the authorities, calling it "a prize . . . as good as a bank note of a hundred guineas" (222). Raymond once again comes to Caleb's defense, arguing that because they live outside the law, thieves must not only resist its incursions but refuse its rewards:

> You certainly ought not to employ against people that you hate, supposing your hatred to be reasonable, the instrumentality of that law which in your practice

> you defy. Be consistent. Either be a friend of law, or its adversary. Depend upon it that, wherever there are laws at all, there will be laws against such people as you and me. Either therefore we all of us deserve the vengeance of the law, or law is not the proper instrument of correcting the misdeeds of mankind.
>
> (222–23)

Raymond's eloquence is convincing, and especially so for Larkins, the man originally in favor of turning Caleb in for the reward. The novel's second failed handshake follows:

> Larkins in particular thanked the captain for his interference, and swore that he would rather part with his right hand, than injure so worthy a lad, or assist such an unheard-of villainy. Saying this, he took me by the hand, and bade me fear nothing.
>
> (224–25)

Here the failure of the handshake lies not in its execution—Larkins and Caleb do in fact clasp hands—but rather the inability of the gesture to effect the solidarity that it is intended to enact. For while Caleb accepts Larkins's hand, he cannot accept what the handshake entails. In Raymond's brotherhood of thieves, equality does not so much make men into siblings, related to one another by bonds prior to law, as transform them into a corporate body. Thus, when Larkins extends his hand to Caleb, the gesture signifies his willingness to "part with" it—a recognition that it is, in effect, no more a part of him than of Caleb. Handshakes among Raymond's men mark a kind of interchangeability of parts within the corporate body and make a claim on the individual that Caleb, for one, cannot honor. He explains his changed perspective after the incident: "Though I did not cease to love them as individuals, my eyes were perfectly opened to their mistakes" (226). Justified as individuals, but mistaken as a group, Raymond and his men are as threatening to Caleb as the prison he has just escaped.

I have suggested that Caleb's rejection of Raymond and his band at once undoes the meaning of his handshake with Larkins and reinforces his sense that solitude has its advantages. But if imprisonment convinces Caleb, with Godwin, that "we ought to be able to do without one another," the rest of the novel insists upon the impossibility of living by a belief in radical self-sufficiency. Caleb can leave the den of thieves behind; he cannot so easily escape his connection to Falkland. Both Falkland's persistent surveillance

(carried out by his agent Gines and the stories circulating about Caleb in the press) and Caleb's own desire for human community (reflected in his failed attempt to settle down with Laura and her family in Wales) put the lie to Godwin's maxim—or at least push the realization of this conditional aim into a distant future. By the end of the novel, Caleb has arrived at a very different conclusion:

> Solitude, separation, banishment! These are words often in the mouths of human beings; but few men, except myself, have felt the full latitude of their meaning. The pride of philosophy has taught us to treat man as an individual. He is no such thing. He holds, necessarily, indispensably, to his species. He is like those twin-births, that have two heads indeed, and four hands; but, if you attempt to detach them from each other, they are inevitably subjected to miserable and lingering destruction.
>
> (303)

Here monstrosity figures the problem of *fraternité*, and the attempt to separate the conjoined twins recalls Larkins's adjuration that "he would rather part with his right hand" than see Caleb come to harm. Caleb recoiled from Larkins as he now recoils from the "miserable and lingering destruction" that "inevitably" follows the "attempt to detach" the individual man from his species being. But the irony of this passage is that in lamenting his outcast state Caleb also identifies its source: it is his necessary, indispensable connection to Falkland that has left him "cut off from the whole human species" (303).[40]

Caleb's isolation resembles that of the novel's other orphan, Emily Melville, who, after Tyrrel turns against her, "now for the first time experienced the anguish of never having known her parents, and being cast entirely upon the charity of people with whom she had too little equality to hope to receive from them the offices of friendship" (61). But what the episode in the den of thieves makes plain is that, for Caleb, equality is not the issue. His inability to join Raymond's band of brothers has nothing to do with the sense in which "too little equality" dashes his hopes of receiving "the offices of friendship." Instead, it underscores the perils of friendship itself. We might understand Godwin's decision to revise the ending of the novel in a similar light. In the manuscript version of the ending, Caleb accuses Falkland of murder, is not believed and, imprisoned once again, descends into madness: things continue as they are, and Caleb is left with "not an enemy in the world—*nor a* FRIEND!" (333). In the published version, his accusation

prompts Falkland's improbable confession and act of forgiveness, which lead in turn to Falkland's death and Caleb's remorse. Caleb's anxiety to be Falkland's friend has obliged him to be his murderer, and Godwin's revision suggests that if not having friends means madness, having friends is equally hazardous. It also iterates Caleb's account of the individual as monstrous twin by concluding a tale of persecution with the moral that you always hurt the one you love.

IV.

The third and last failed handshake of *Caleb Williams* suggests a bleak solution to the problem of *fraternité*, one that addresses the perils of friendship by divesting the gesture of its meaning. Tyrrel recoils from Falkland's outstretched hand and Caleb leaves the robbers behind because neither can abide what the gesture entails. More than merely symbolizing the failure to arrive at agreement or mutual accord, in these scenes Godwin dramatizes the critique of social contract theory advanced in *Political Justice*. The novel's last handshake is a different kind of failure, and its difference from the first two failed gestures complicates both the novel's political allegory and Godwin's critique of social relations. It intimates that the political conflict the novel has been allegorizing has begun to be supplanted by a new form of social relations. With the last handshake, the individual's necessary and indispensable connection to others, which Godwin so clearly finds inimical to individual freedom, gives way to something that looks more like purely impersonal exchange. Perhaps the final measure of the novel's pessimism is that this kind of impersonality does not bring us any closer to "the most perfect man" of *Political Justice*, "to whom society is not a necessary of life, but a luxury, innocent and enviable, in which he joyfully indulges"[41] Instead, in *Caleb Williams*, with the coming of a social realm in which political conflict appears to be giving way to impersonal exchange, political justice escapes the terms in which Godwin sought to critique and refine it.

Following his penultimate interview with Falkland, in which he refuses to sign a paper professing Falkland's innocence, Caleb meets Falkland's servant, Thomas, who was once Caleb's friend. Taking his master's side, Thomas urges Caleb to repent his "reprobate doings" and retract the accusations he has made:

> Saying this, he held out his hand, and took hold of mine. This action seemed strange, but I at first thought it the unpremeditated result of his solemn and

> well-intentioned adjuration. I felt however that he put something in my hand. The next moment he quitted his hold, and hastened from me with the swiftness of an arrow. What he had thus given me was a bank-note of twenty pounds. I had no doubt that he had been charged to deliver it to me from Mr. Falkland.
>
> (286–87)

This is not the first time Caleb receives money from Falkland. Early in the novel, Falkland "[put] five guineas into [Caleb's] hand" to buy his silence (or, more precisely, his loyalty, since at this point Caleb had yet to learn Falkland's secret) (8). Falkland's motives appear to be the same in this instance, but, as Caleb remarks, there is something strange about the gesture. Its strangeness, as I have already suggested, has to do with the sense in which the novel, having alerted us to the significance of the handshake, now presents us with a gesture that is both more and less than a handshake. Rather than an "unpremeditated" act, it is a calculated maneuver—and the calculation is not Thomas's but Falkland's. Thomas acts not in propria persona but as Falkland's intermediary; in this sense, one might say that the hand he offers is less his than Falkland's. Nor does the act reflect Thomas's, or Falkland's, "solemn and well-intentioned adjuration." The gesture is bound up with the money Thomas delivers, and whatever Falkland intends to communicate to Caleb—whether the twenty-pound note is a bribe or a test of loyalty—it is mediated both by Thomas, who carries the message, and the money that is the message. When Larkins offered Caleb his hand, the gesture spoke to his willingness to part with it on Caleb's behalf (literalizing the oath that often accompanies the gesture: "I give you my hand"). The intensely personal nature of that encounter highlights the strangely disembodied quality of Thomas's gesture. What looks like a face-to-face interaction between two individuals is in fact a far more complicated, ambiguous, and impersonal transaction: Falkland reaches out to Caleb, but only through the mediation of Thomas and the banknote.

The novel's previous handshakes conform to the gesture's customary function. Even in failure, each serves to clarify the status of the relationship between individuals. Clearly, one reason that Godwin is interested in the handshake is that it is a practice of everyday life whose very purpose is to announce its own symbolic significance. In the novel's political allegory, the handshake thus takes on a kind of second-order symbolism, becoming for Godwin an interpersonal and corporeal manifestation of the kind of politi-

cal significance that revolutionaries in France invested in dress.[42] Thomas's empty gesture seems to do away with this political frame of reference, instead recalling an earlier regime of patronage and corruption.[43] But this gesture is more than an allusion to the bad old days. While we might read the exchange between Thomas and Caleb as Godwin's indictment of political corruption, the very fact that it takes the form of an exchange, the way that it is linked to the novel's previous handshakes, and what Caleb makes of the gesture all contribute to the sense that Godwin is pointing not to the past but to the future, that we are meant to recognize the gesture as a transaction, and that its meaning is bound up with its strangely abstract and impersonal character.

In puzzling out the meaning of this encounter, we can take our lead from Caleb himself, who turns his attention to the meaning of the banknote. He meditates on the injuries Falkland has done him and weighs the propriety of receiving money from "the hands that were embrued in [his] blood." To this way of thinking, the banknote is blood money, and accepting it makes Caleb complicit not only in Falkland's crimes but in his own persecution. But Caleb does not stop here. He goes on to observe that "the actual means of existence are the property of all," which prompts him to ask, "What should hinder me from taking that of which I was really in want, when in taking it I risked no vengeance and perpetrated no violence?" (287). Finally, he decides that his need of the money and his right to sustain himself must outweigh its source: "He that lately possessed it has injured me," he reasons, "[but] does that alter its value as a medium of exchange?" (288). Caleb is right, of course, but in turning from questions about his values to this question of value, the conclusion he reaches is also a rationalization. While Falkland's bribe is in no way a commercial transaction—no goods are exchanged, nothing is bought or sold—Caleb's thoughts about it call attention to the money's transferability and exchangeability and thereby underscore the different conception of value at hand.

While one could just as easily read Caleb's conviction that "the actual means of existence are the property of all" as a critique of exchange value, my point here is to make Caleb into neither an apologist for the market nor a kind of communist before the fact. The novel's final handshake steps outside these terms altogether. In Caleb's reflections on value, Godwin recasts the terms of his political critique by calling to mind the discourse about manners that accompanied the emergence of commercial society. If the gesture

by which Thomas passes the banknote to Caleb is meaningless in itself, for Godwin its emptiness is the sign of a historical transformation that threatens to supersede the form of political conflict in which he, Burke, and Paine had been engaged. The shift to which Godwin alludes has been characterized by J. G. A. Pocock as a product of the growth of commercial society:

> As the individual moved from the farmer-warrior world of ancient citizenship or Gothic *libertas*, he entered an increasingly transactional universe of "commerce and the arts," . . . in which his relationships and interactions with other social beings, and with their products, became increasingly complex and various, modifying and developing more and more aspects of his personality.[44]

The precise terms of Pocock's analysis are less important than the stakes of the transformation he describes, particularly the way in which in the late eighteenth century manners were supplanting virtues and social values were replacing political values. And we need not make Godwin into a classical republican or civic humanist to recognize a version of Caleb in Pocock's description of "the classical citizen" as "at heart a tragic hero, unsafe to associate with, who insists that he is living in the realm of freedom and not that of necessity."[45]

In the end, transposing politics into gesture allows Godwin to address a form of political discourse that is not merely new but in fact unrecognizable as politics from the point of view of the political world—of virtue, equality, law, and rights—that both he and Caleb had imagined themselves to inhabit. *Caleb Williams*'s political allegory seems to require a political solution. Instead, Caleb enters a realm in which relationships between individuals are necessarily negotiated through exchange and mediated by others. It is this "increasingly transactional universe" to which Caleb's encounter with Thomas alludes. With the final handshake, the questions of value with which the novel has been concerned—the ethical dilemmas that constitute Caleb's "theater of calamity" (3)—are supplanted by Caleb's meditation on exchange value, as blood money is transmuted into "the actual means of existence." This redefinition of value, moreover, seems to circumvent the problem of equality by replacing it with a notion of equivalence. Thomas shakes Caleb's hand not as a recognition of mutual agreement or fellowship but as a gesture of leave-taking, an expediency that does not assert equality so much as suggest that equality is no longer at stake. Falkland offers the banknote, perhaps as a test of loyalty; Caleb receives it as a means to an end. In this sense, the novel's

final failed handshake suggests that "the due medium between individuality and concert" will be "a medium of exchange."

Caleb's rationalization thus reflects the emergence not only of commercial society but also of an increasingly impersonal and abstract concept of the social. If his decision to accept the money looks like corruption or false consciousness, it also reveals a conception of utility that would supersede such familiar moral or epistemological judgments. As Caleb puts it, "The property in question will be beneficial to me, and the voluntary surrender of it is accompanied with no injury to its late proprietor; what other condition can be necessary to render the use of it on my part a duty?" (278–79). This utilitarian calculus leaves the old world of politics and ethics behind: Caleb's "duty" to make use of the money is no virtue. But neither is it a moral failing. Instead, his calculation divests the idea of duty of its ethical implications, just as it reduces all value to use value. It goes without saying that this is a radically different conception of the social world than that of the country-house idyll that concludes *Humphry Clinker*. Even if, as I argued in the previous chapter, Smollett's depiction of Matthew Bramble's household is a merely imaginary solution to the social ills the novel depicts (and a failure that marks the limit of his ability to imagine a new, improved scheme of social organization), the novel's retreat into a reordered vision of the past set in the Welsh countryside makes it clear that it cannot conceive of the future glimpsed in *Caleb Williams*.

Caleb's indulgence in abstraction (his recourse to notions of equivalence and utility to defend his actions) might provide us in turn with another way of reading *Political Justice*, in that Godwin seems to suggest that "the right of private judgment" depends upon this kind of abstraction for its philosophical justification.[46] The concept of utility, from this standpoint, enables Caleb to test—or allows Godwin to imagine that Caleb is testing—the validity of competing social values.[47] Larger questions about Godwin's political philosophy aside, these shifting definitions of value and equality mark Caleb and Thomas's handshake as a modern gesture, one that announces a new relationship that is, as Pocock puts it, "social and not political in character."[48] But if the novel's final handshake offers money and manners as compensation for the loss of political virtue, it is crucial to Godwin that the gesture looks both forward and back. It stands as a reminder of what has been lost, or is in the process of being lost, and points to a form of relationship toward which the novel can only gesture. The partial and imperfect emergence of

commercial society, in history and in the novel, might thus be understood as Godwin's reflection on the limits of the kind of political allegorization in which he had been engaged. The abstraction of Caleb's reflections on value represents a kind of philosophical solitude that puts him in the impossible position of being the judge in his own case. As every reader of *Caleb Williams* knows, Caleb's encounter with Thomas is not in fact the novel's climactic scene. But if the novel's endings famously leave unresolved the problems it poses, what I have been suggesting is that the absence of resolution is itself a measure of the full range of problems the novel addresses.

Chapter 5

Jane Austen and the Morphology of the Marriage Plot

> "The good ended happily, and the bad
> unhappily. That is what Fiction means."
>
> —Miss Prism, in Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*

That Austen's novels are concerned with their protagonists' inner lives goes without saying. Her heroines think and feel, and one of the distinctive features of the novels is their depiction of these thoughts and feelings. For many readers, Austen's characters are the measure of her achievement as a novelist; as those who have taught the novels recently will attest, their heroines' appeal and surprising relevance to the lives of twenty-first-century undergraduates are essential to Austen's continued popularity. That contemporary readers so eagerly identify with early nineteenth-century novelistic characters also grounds the claims for Austen's timelessness that increasingly put her in a category formerly reserved for Shakespeare alone. Austen criticism has of course been attentive to her representation of characters' inner worlds, and many of the most influential readings of the novels have understood them as dramas of consciousness. Whether the emphasis falls on growth and development or judgment and self-awareness is in a sense less significant than a common critical orientation toward interiority and personal identity. Accounts of Austen's novelistic technique have reinforced this focus on the internal by arguing that the adoption, refinement, and mastery of free indirect discourse constitutes her principal contribution to the development of the novel as a genre.[1] Indeed, in many accounts, Austen serves as a critical synecdoche for the realist novel in general. She initiates the tradition that reaches its apogee with Henry James, inaugurating a story about

the rise of psychological realism which remains the prevailing understanding of the development of the nineteenth-century novel.

Austen's apparent lack of interest in the outside world has only strengthened her central place in the critical story about the novel and individual consciousness. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Reginald Farrer described Austen's novels as "hermetically sealed" and claimed that "she can never be out of date, because she never was in any particular date."[2] The same tendency to link Austen's timelessness and her disregard for historical reference is evident in Tony Tanner's remark that "the overall impression given by [*Pride and Prejudice*] is of a small section of society locked in an almost . . . timeless, ahistorical present in which very little will or can, or even should, change."[3] Marilyn Butler captures the view succinctly when she observes, "Technically the striking thing about her novels is indeed that they do not mention the French Revolution and barely allude to the Napoleonic Wars" (an especially striking statement in a study that demonstrates how deeply Austen's novels are situated in the politics of the 1790s).[4] The best historicist studies of Austen of the last fifty years, from Alistair Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate* (1971) and Butler's *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975) to William Galperin's *The Historical Austen* (2003), share the sense that social and political history shapes the novels in ways that historical reference or context fail to capture.[5] Such approaches simultaneously insist that Austen's concerns extend beyond the self and acknowledge that her interest in contemporary history and politics isn't manifested in references to specific persons, places, or events.

This assessment of Austen's attitude toward historical reference was already implicit in Walter Scott's 1816 review of *Emma* in the *Quarterly Review*. Scott argued that Austen's novels "belong to a class of fictions which has arisen almost in our own times"; he praised her for "the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life" and for her ability to create "a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place."[6] In an analogy that resonates with Austen's interest in the picturesque, Scott wrote that "the turn of this author's novels bears the same relation to that of the sentimental and romantic cast, that cornfields and cottages and meadows bear to the highly adorned grounds of a show mansion, or the rugged sublimities of a mountain landscape." An Austen novel is neither "so captivating" as the beautiful nor "so grand" as the sublime; instead, "it offers those who frequent it a pleasure nearly allied with the experience

of their own social habits."[7] It is a pleasure, as Virginia Woolf would later describe it, that derives from an "insight into [the] profundity" of "the trivialities of day-to-day existence, of parties, picnics, and country dances."[8] Everyday life is Austen's province, Scott and Woolf suggest, but for both the aesthetic pleasure afforded by this kind of realistic representation is shadowed by an anxiety that the experience it takes as its object is generic—that the communities and the culture Austen represents do not refer to specific places or people but to people and places so broadly drawn as to appeal to any reader, anywhere.

Scott's and Woolf's assessments also imply that Austen's depictions of everyday life might simply be boring. The "trivialities of day-to-day existence" sound, well, trivial. And Scott's praise can be equivocal: because Austen "keep[s] close to common incidents, and to such characters as occupy the ordinary walks of life . . . we never miss the excitation which depends upon a narrative of uncommon events, arising from the consideration of minds, manners, and sentiments, greatly above our own."[9] He remarks that *Emma* "has even less story than either of the preceding novels" and says that the reader "may return from his promenade to the ordinary business of life, without any chance of having his head turned by the recollection of the scene through which he has been wandering."[10] A comment by Susan Ferrier, the author of *Marriage* (1818), underscores the sense that Austen's genius is bound up with the uneventfulness of her novels: "I have been reading *Emma*, which is excellent, there is no story whatsoever, and the heroine is no better than other people; but the characters are all so true to life, and the style is piquant, that it does not require the adventitious aids of mystery and adventure."[11]

For other readers, this absence of action is a positive fault. Austen recorded the response of Mrs. Guiton, an acquaintance and early reader of *Emma*, who "thought it too natural to be interesting."[12] Maria Edgeworth more pointedly claimed that she gave the novel up after the first volume: "There was no story in it, except that Miss Emma found that the man whom she designed for Harriets lover was an admirer of her own—& he was affronted at being refused by Emma and Harriet wore the willow—*and smooth, thin, water-gruel* is according to Emma's father's opinion a very good thing & it is very difficult to make a cook understand what you mean by smooth thin water gruel!"[13] Clearly, Edgeworth would prefer to have her head turned; reading *Emma*, it seems, made her "understand . . . smooth thin water gruel" all too well. The distance between positive and negative assessments of Austen's representa-

tion of everyday life indicates that, somewhere along the way, a line has been crossed, and fidelity to "nature as she really exists in the common walks of life" runs the risk of becoming "too natural to be interesting."[14]

This account of Austen's realism—both what it achieves and the danger it courts—recalls her own well-known description of her fiction as "the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour."[15] Her attention to both inward experience and everyday life reflect the same interest in detail and determined focus on "the little bit." As Scott suggested when he contrasted his own command of "the Big Bow-wow strain" with Austen's "exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment," her expertise has been associated from the beginning with her novels' small scale.[16] This sense of the particular quality and quantity of Austen's authorial labor—"much" fine work on a "little bit . . . of Ivory"—extends beyond the novels' focus on individual consciousness and selection of domestic subjects and settings. Austen works on a small scale in terms of method as well as subject matter. Her power is not merely predicated on the representation of inwardness and the everyday. It is ambition turned inward, and her authority is the product of a range of conscious exclusions reflected not only in the novels' limited casts of characters, cozy country settings, class-bound social worlds, and apparent withdrawal from the larger world but also in what D. A. Miller has recently called "Austen Style," "a kind of extraterritoriality," as he terms it, established within "a marriage culture that is total, excepting no one from its dominion, and needing to be propagated always and everywhere as the condition of its being produced at all."[17]

If Austen's "little bit . . . of Ivory" has come to stand for the particular character of her realism, another familiar remark from her correspondence points to a different understanding of the novelist's work. Writing to her niece, an aspiring novelist, Austen says, "You are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life;—3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on—& I hope you will write a great deal more, & make full use of them while they are so very favourably arranged."[18] Commentators have understandably focused on how "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village" reflect the narrow scope of the novels' imagined worlds. They have paid little attention, by contrast, to what the remark suggests about Austen's handling of that restricted world. The

idea that writing a novel involves "collecting . . . People" and "getting them exactly into . . . a spot" in order to "make full use of them" reveals a degree of attention to narrative structure that looks surprising from the standpoint of Austen criticism. "Collecting" and "making use of" characters does not fit the image of the novelist as expert observer of thoughts and feelings. Moreover, Austen's language of counting, arrangement, and utility reminds us that scale is not only a matter of size but of ratios and abstract relationships.[19] From this standpoint, "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on" not only because Austen works on a small scale but because collecting people in this way allows for their favorable arrangement. The idea that novelists collect people in order to arrange them—to get them "into . . . a spot"—articulates a different sense of novelistic practice, one that approaches characters from the outside rather than in terms of their interiority. It regards them as much in quantitative terms—as entities that can be collected, arranged, and used—as in terms of their personal qualities.

I.

The perspective on the novel articulated in Austen's letter to her niece emphasizes its experimental, analytical dimension, and this chapter makes a case for the centrality of structure and plot to Austen's theorization of the relationship between the novel and social reality. In her novels, characters' actions and interactions—their relationships with one another and with the spaces in which they are positioned and through which they move—are as important as their thoughts and feelings. Rather than a reorientation of the novel's referential project, Austen's interest in the detailed representation of everyday life in fact constitutes an intensification of the workings of narrative structure. By eschewing extraordinary incidents, Austen emphasizes the minimal conditions of narrative; three or four families in a country village might not satisfy the demands of story understood in terms of dramatic events and surprising developments, but they establish a minimal condition for novelistic plots. Austen's attention to the everyday, in other words, might not reflect realism's demand for an ever-finer-grained representation of social reality so much as a stripping away of the residue of the extraordinary and the great that is designed to lay bare the workings of plot. This is a Mr. Woodhousian conception of narrative as "thin water gruel": the point is not about the poverty of the materials but the difficulty, and the significance, of their proper preparation.

A simpler way to put this point would be to say that Austen is interested in plot as the Russian formalists understood it. Approaching characters in terms of number and arrangement highlights their structural rather than representational function. If characters serve a purpose that is primarily referential, it makes sense to understand the communities Austen depicts as microcosms of society (as most critics do).[20] Conversely, in structural terms, "3 or 4 Families in a Country Village" may well be "the very thing to work on" not because they stand for society in general but because they offer a cast of characters sufficient for the purposes of the plot. The significance of narrative elements is not metonymic but functional. Vladimir Propp speaks to this conception of narrative when he justifies the "limitation of material" in his study of the folktale by taking into account "the degree of repetition of the tale phenomena." "If repetition is great," Propp writes, "then one may take a limited amount of material. If repetition is small, this is impossible. The repetition of fundamental components [in the folktale] . . . exceeds all expectations."[21] Three or four families are sufficient because they provide all the variation Austen requires. Three or four families suffice because "repetition is great."

What Propp discovers in "the labyrinth of the tale's multiformity" is not multiplicity but "an amazing uniformity."[22] This central insight of *Morphology of the Folktale* follows from the observation that "a tale often attributes identical actions to various personages."[23] In the folktale, characters' functions—understood as "*an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action*"—take priority over their attributes or qualities.[24] That the tale "ascribes with great ease identical actions to persons, objects, and animals" demonstrates that narrative is not the result of the intentional actions of (fictional) characters.[25] Characters signify by virtue of the actions they perform, and narrative action is defined by "its place in the course of narration" and not by "the personage who carries out the function."[26] From this perspective, Elizabeth Bennet's refusal of Mr. Collins's marriage proposal differs from her refusal of Mr. Darcy's because of their very different locations in the structure of the narrative. Along similar lines, in *Sense and Sensibility*, Lucy Steele gains the favor of Mrs. Ferrars not because of her personality, her character, or her flattery of her future mother-in-law but precisely "because she was *not Elinor*."[27] If these seem like trivial observations, their significance is that they reveal how closely Austen's atti-

tude toward her materials resembles Propp's attitude toward his; her approach to the marriage plot is like his handling of the folktale.

Pointing out Austen's affinities with Russian formalism would appear to move her even further away from reference and from history. After all, Propp is exclusively concerned with narrative structure; he is uninterested in the referential significance of the folktale.[28] It is all the more striking, then, that narrative structure rather than historical reference underwrites Edward Said's influential postcolonial reading of *Mansfield Park*. Said's analysis of Austen's novel in *Culture and Imperialism* is part of his attempt "to discern . . . a counterpoint between overt patterns in British writings about Britain and representations of the world beyond the British Isles." More broadly, it illustrates a related formal claim about "the function of space, geography, and location" in the novel as a genre.[29] Said asserts that empire and the slave trade have "a definitive function" in *Mansfield Park*, but his argument is grounded less in the way these topics emerge in the text than the structural correspondence between Fanny Price's "domestic or small-scale movement in space" and "the larger, more openly colonial movements of Sir Thomas."[30] That Antigua "is both incidental, referred to only in passing, and absolutely crucial to the action" is a function of Austen's coordination of the domestic and the colonial and the novel's demonstration that "the two movements depend on each other."[31] Maintaining good order at home at Mansfield Park requires the regulation and rule of the imperial estate. If, in one sense, the two estates are continuous with one another, in a stronger sense, their association depends on what Said calls Austen's "geographical and spatial clarification"—a concerted effort to forge figural connections between examples of "domestic and international authority."[32] When Sir Thomas returns from Antigua, he "reinstate[s] himself in all the wonted concerns of his Mansfield life" and reorders a household that, in his absence, has fallen into disorder (*MP* 149). On the one hand, he merely acts at home as he has been acting abroad. On the other hand, however, his actions establish an analogy between home and plantation that carries greater significance than simply considering them as two separate scenes of action. That the Antigua plantation and the Mansfield estate require analogous forms of management is the sign of their structural identity.

This correlation of the domestic and the colonial is a powerful example of the more than merely contextual character of Austen's historical imagina-

tion. For Said, the connection is made possible because both home and plantation are part of a single culture. Austen's representation of "domestic or small-scale movement in space" thus provides a basis for the novels' engagement with the larger world; as Michael Rosenblum puts it, they serve to align "movements within a narrative with the movements of history."[33] It follows that these movements also reflect the structures that make such connections possible, and from this perspective their significance has to do with what elemental features of realistic narrative—descriptions of acts and actions, not merely of characters but also, I will argue, of objects—reveal about the relationship between Austen's absolute command of her narrative materials and the desire for a similar mastery of the social world she strives to represent. The text of the novel is situated within the larger terrain of the culture to which it, in turn, refers. The power of this kind of symptomatic—or suspicious, or ideological—reading is predicated on the identification of homologies between different manifestations and locations of the single system composed by a culture.[34]

In chapter 3, I argued that the kind of critical mapping Said and Franco Moretti have advocated for the study of the novel was in fact a key feature of the eighteenth-century novel. In *Humphry Clinker*, the flat characters, episodic plots, and failures of realism that have been taken as signs of Smollett's deficiencies as a novelist in fact reflect a novelistic aesthetic oriented toward a conception of society as a networked system. Smollett's approach to the novel does not ground its representation of social reality in the embodiment of individual experience but instead understands the social in terms of the systems and schemes that organize it. In *Humphry Clinker*, the epistolary novel becomes the vehicle for a project that differs sharply from Richardson's; rather than representing character from the inside out, Smollett uses the form to approach it from the outside in. But this way of reading, and this kind of novel, also calls attention to a crucial difference between the networked system and the kind of cultural maps advocated by Said and Moretti. The key fact about networked systems is not that each point in the system is a version of every other point: precisely the opposite. Points or nodes in a network are connected in a way that explicitly refuses to assimilate them to a larger whole. Smollett advances this claim most powerfully in *Humphry Clinker*'s parodic conclusion, in which the resolution of the narrative action back home at Brambleton Hall stands in stark contrast to the disunified nation the novel's excursion has so scrupulously surveyed. The novel ends,

in other words, with a metonymic failure that makes it clear that the microcosm cannot represent the whole.

Austen is not Smollett, of course. She does not stand outside the main tradition of the realist novel, nor does she turn away from the representation of consciousness. She was deeply influenced by Richardson, and her novels are generally, and probably rightly, understood to exemplify Ian Watt's description of the novel as "a full and authentic report of human experience."[35] But formal realism does not exhaust Austen's achievement as a novelist. Her novels are stranger and more self-aware than our often quite narrow conception of realism permits us to recognize. As much as we appreciate Austen's command of detail and what Scott calls her "knowledge of the human heart," she often treats her characters as though they were game pieces to be moved around on a board or action figures to be positioned and repositioned in elaborately choreographed scenes.[36] Consider the scene in *Mansfield Park* in which Fanny Price, suffering from a headache, disappears on a sofa at "the other end" of "a very long" room full of people (*MP* 57). Fanny withdraws because she feels unwell, but her position on the sofa and in the room are also expressive features of the scene; her physical placement is obviously, and even self-reflexively, a reflection of her place in the Bertram family and in the social world beyond it. But this interpretation and the meaning it generates is a function of her positioning—her placement in Austen's description of the room—and its connection to the movement of the narrative. This small instance, as much as the larger plot in which Fanny plays a role in two love triangles, exemplifies how Austen gets characters into "a spot" to "make full use of them." The significance of Fanny's placement on the sofa demonstrates what it means for her to be not just a realistically drawn representation of a person but a novelistic character—a part of a plot.[37]

Consider another scene, early in *Pride and Prejudice*, in which Elizabeth Bennet and Caroline Bingley pass the time one evening at Netherfield by walking "up and down the room together." The performance not only attracts Mr. Darcy's attention but elicits his "shocking" speculation that they "are conscious that [their] figures appear to the greatest advantage in walking" (*PP* 42). Darcy's remark is more than witty innuendo; it is also a rejoinder to a comment Elizabeth has made about figures in motion in the previous chapter. In that scene, Elizabeth and Mrs. Hurst encounter Darcy and Miss Bingley walking in the garden; Mrs. Hurst joins them, leaving no room for Elizabeth on the path, which "just admitted three." Darcy suggests they

"had better go into the avenue," but Elizabeth declines, saying, "No, no; stay where you are.—You are charmingly group'd, and appear to uncommon advantage. The picturesque would be spoilt by admitting a fourth. Good bye" (*PP* 39). This charming grouping plays on the discourse of the picturesque —adding another figure to the group would ruin the composition of the scene—but it also points to, and comments on, Austen's favorable arrangement of her characters. The place that Mrs. Hurst takes is Elizabeth's. Elizabeth is the third vertex of the love triangle—but, rather than disrupting this arrangement, her displacement by Caroline Bingley's married older sister draws attention to it. In pointing the group out and framing it for the reader as an instance of the picturesque, Elizabeth comments on an arrangement that is itself already a comment on the developing action of the novel.

In these scenes, the arrangement of characters operates as both reference and allegory. Fanny is over there, at the far end of the room, on the sofa; she is also an outsider, whose desperation not to impose is itself often felt, or at least treated, as an imposition. The path through the shrubbery at Netherfield is only wide enough for three, and Elizabeth makes four; but, as part of the triangle that includes Darcy and Caroline Bingley, she also makes three, and, because her exclusion from the group of three on the walk highlights rather than disguises the structural dynamics of the love triangle, her fourness expresses her threeness. In addition, and in a way that suggests that Austen was not only conscious of this kind of calculation but intended that readers recognize it, too, this little drama in the garden replays, as farce, the serious exchange about the implications of Elizabeth's "inclusion" that immediately precedes it, in which Caroline reprimands Darcy for flirting with Elizabeth, criticizes Mrs. Bennet (his "mother-in-law") and the younger Bennet girls, and proposes that, once he and Elizabeth are married, he "let the portraits of your uncle and aunt Philips be placed in the gallery at Pemberley. Put them next to your great uncle the judge. They are in the same profession you know; only in different lines" (*PP* 39). Marriage, Caroline points out, does not just involve the happy couple; it creates connections, and relations that are not chosen as spouses are chosen.

Imagining the incongruous juxtaposition of portraits at Pemberley is a graphic, if static, example of getting characters into a spot. Emma creates a dynamic version of the same effect when she responds to Mrs. Weston's speculation about Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax by picturing Miss Bates "haunting the Abbey, and thanking [Mr. Knightley] all day for his great

kindness in marrying Jane" (*E* 177). In *Mansfield Park*, Austen choreographs a more complicated set of relationships in her description of the Mansfield party's walk in the "wilderness" at Sotherton. The visit to Mr. Rushworth's estate has important consequences for the novel's developing relationships. Mary Crawford's blunder in the chapel at Sotherton, when, unaware that Edmund Bertram is soon to take orders, she ridicules religious devotion, and Maria Bertram's decision not to wait for her fiancé to return with the key to the iron gate that blocks the entry to the park but, at Henry Crawford's urging, to "pass round the edge of the gate . . . to be more at large" (*MP* 79), both foreshadow key developments in the plot.[38] But it is not only moments like these that foreground the arrangement of characters in space that are invested with what feels like special significance in the Sotherton chapters; action in the episode carries a kind of double signification from the beginning. Whether Fanny will be included in the party—and how (Edmund volunteers to take her place at home with his mother; Mrs. Grant's offer to stay with Lady Bertram restores him "to his share of the party")—and who should ride with Henry Crawford on the barouche-box ("Happy Julia! Unhappy Maria!") are questions that at once attend to the business of getting the characters to Sotherton and conduct a kind of second-order commentary on the narrative (on Fanny's place in the family or the Miss Bertrams' designs on Henry Crawford). By the time the visitors make their way into the "wilderness," the episode seems poised on the verge of a full-blown allegory.

Critics have not missed the emblematic nature of the scene. Most have understood the walk in the wilderness as an escape from the old-fashioned, stifling atmosphere of the house—a sense of freedom from restraint that is seemingly heightened when the young people leave just as "the question of surveying the grounds, with the who and the how, was likely to be more fully agitated, and Mrs. Norris was beginning to arrange by what junction of carriages and horses most could be done" (*MP* 71).[39] Once outside, however, and ostensibly liberated from external control, they immediately set about arranging themselves, and the scene becomes a different sort of allegory. They "began to form into parties" (*MP* 71) and "naturally" (*MP* 72) divide into groups. Henry, Maria, and Mr. Rushworth form one triangle; Edmund, Mary, and Fanny form another; and the movement of the groups, their formation and reformation, evasions and pursuits, constitute a running commentary on the forces and desires that are drawing them together or splitting them

apart. The scene invites schematization: A, B, and C walk off together; A and B leave C; D, E, and F come upon C; F leaves the group with the intention to return; D and E do not wait for F and leave C; G comes upon C and then leaves to go after D and E; F returns and then pursues D, E, and now G; C finally goes to find A and B. In so doing, it requires that the reader follow not only what characters are saying or even what they are doing but how they come together and move apart. These arrangements and rearrangements are central to the plotting of action in the scene; what characters think and feel are, in a significant sense, merely commentaries on their movements, connections, and associations. In *Mansfield Park*, in particular, what amounts to a theatrical analogy is particularly powerful—not only because the novel has much to say about the theater and dramatic representation, but also because it self-consciously presents scenes as carefully choreographed sequences of actions. Characters do not just come and go, as would real people in real life; instead, their comings and goings are like stage entrances and exits, and they often carry a significance analogous to entrances and exits in a play.[40]

Read in this way, not only does the design of the garden at Sotherton follow the principles of picturesque beauty, the patterning of the walk in the wilderness also performs the kind of rigorously structural understanding of narrative that characterizes Propp's formalist account of the fairy tale. The scene makes it clear that, for Austen, the marriage plot is not merely a category of novelistic narrative or just one theme among many. Instead, Austen's orchestration of movement and arrangement, especially as they express the narratological and characterological complications that shape the novel's love stories, emphasizes the structural significance of the marriage plot as plot. Paying attention to the structure of the marriage plot does not mean that every marriage plot is the same (although, viewed from a sufficient distance, they are). Nor does it mean that marriage plots admit no significant variation. Instead, it reminds us that variation is variation from a norm and serves as a corrective to the strange sense one gets reading Austen criticism that the most predictable narrative outcomes require that characters develop or situations change in dramatic and unforeseeable ways. The real surprise, as every reader of Austen knows, is that we so consistently experience something like surprise at matches that are known in advance.[41] That's the game. The marriage plot defines the rules by which it is played.

For Austen, the marriage plot represents something like a principle of structuration—or perhaps a context in which structuration is made visible

in practice. It frames relationships between individuals in such a way as to make it impossible (or difficult, or at least misleading or incomplete) to arrive at a satisfactory account by focusing exclusively on either individual actors or social totalities.[42] Convinced that Austen's characters are so fully realized that we know them personally, we are confronted by the almost blinding conventionality of the marriages that conclude the novels. Against Miller's description of "marriage culture" as "total, excepting no one from its dominion, and needing to be propagated always and everywhere as the condition of its being produced at all," Austen envisions a variety of situations in which disparate actions and decisions, connections and associations, occasions and events are translated and transformed.[43] The crux of the marriage plot is not freedom or determination—or even the play between these extremes. Instead, its structure is rigorously relational. It describes the interaction of agents and structures, and in so doing it insists on the relationality of relationships. Perfect freedom or absolute determination are simply impossible; the rules of the game do not permit them. To understand the marriage plot exclusively in terms of the movement from one state (singleness), through a transitional period (courtship), to a final state (marriage) is thus a mistake. Austen suggests as much by having Emma seemingly skip the transitional period altogether, lurching instead from a determination never to marry to the realization "that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!" (*E* 320). (Fanny's strangely covert courtship of Edmund, and his belated recognition of the inevitability of their union, works in much the same way.) Against an understanding of courtship and marriage as ritual practices or of "marriage culture" as "total," Austen treats the marriage plot in the way Bruno Latour recommends that we understand the social—not as "a homogeneous thing" but as "a trail of *associations* between heterogeneous elements."[44]

As Latour seeks to redefine the work of the social scientist, Austen understands the work of the novelist to involve "the *tracing of associations*" rather than the presentation of particular relations or the representation of a specific domain of action.[45] In Austen's novels, these heterogeneous elements include the lovers but also other people (friends and relations whose intentional or inadvertent contributions to the relationship of the principals are not only obstacles or inducements but, in many cases, enabling conditions), settings and fields of action (the garden walks or wilderness paths that function as constraints or conditions which translate relationships into actions and make actions possible), and even inanimate objects (which, in

the case of Henry Crawford's barouche, divide the world of the lovers into inside and outside—in a way, it should be noted, that inverts the terms' normal valuation). In its creation and examination of these associations, the marriage plot novel becomes a proto-sociological project—and underscores fiction's contribution to the attempt to theorize the social.

II.

Austen's understanding of association explains how it is that, in *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, a piano or a harp can function as an agent in the plot.[46] If all that concerns us about Jane Fairfax's piano is who has given it to her or that Mary Crawford's harp reveals one of her moral failings, we miss the sense in which each of these objects, in being introduced into the novels' closed communities, both signifies and, in the way that the agency of human actors is routed through them, acts as an agent of change. The piano and the harp are at once signs and what Latour calls "quasi-objects."[47] What they mean, what they say about Jane or Mary, is just part of the story. They also operate in *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* in a way that corresponds with Michel Serres's description of the status of a ball in a game. "A ball is not an ordinary object," Serres writes, "for it is what it is only if a subject holds it. Over there, on the ground, it is nothing; it is stupid; it has no meaning, no function, and no value. Ball isn't played alone. Those who do, those who hog the ball, are bad players and are soon excluded from the game. They are said to be selfish. The collective game doesn't need persons, people out for themselves."[48] Jane's piano and Mary's harp are more complicated examples than Serres's ball; they are not used to play a game, they are themselves played. But the distinction Serres draws between playing and being "selfish" still applies—it perhaps even intensifies the sense in which playing only for oneself or for one's own purposes (which Mary does and Jane is, wrongly, imagined to do) has "no meaning, no function, and no value." As they represent Jane's and Mary's accomplishments, the piano and the harp are objects (and thus invite us to judge Mary and Emma to judge Jane). As they assume or are invested with narrative functions, they become quasi-objects (or, which amounts to the same thing, quasi-subjects). Getting Mary's harp to Mansfield is a story in itself and, for the Crawfords, an education in the ways of the world "seventy miles from London" (*MP* 46); like Mary's account of marriage, "it is a maneuvering business" (*MP* 37). The point (and Latour's and Serres's point) is not that the harp acts but rather that in being acted upon

it exerts an influence of its own—in this case, in a way that reveals a difference between life in the country and the city. To register this form of agency is not to displace character altogether but to notice how Austen's novels consistently call attention to the contiguity of agency and structure.

That is what I take the scenes I discussed in the last section of the chapter to be doing. Their self-reflexivity and quasi-allegorical effects disclose a double register in which particular actions are associated with (or assembled into) larger narrative patterns. These scenes are capable of working as they do, and of calling attention to the work they are doing, because they are part of a narrated world that signifies in all respects. The world of the novel—unlike the real world, so often recalcitrant and frustratingly meaningless—is one in which all details are telling, or at least potentially so. The Sotherton episode, especially the walk in the wilderness, works in much the same way as the casting of the amateur theatricals back at Mansfield. In embedding the unrealized performance of *Lovers' Vows* within the novel, Austen doubles down on character, as it were, by slotting characters into theatrical roles that reflect, and reflect upon, their "real" personalities. As Anhalt to Mary Crawford's Amelia, Edmund plays a clergyman and Mary's accepted lover; Henry Crawford and Maria Bertram's roles afford them ample time alone to rehearse the relationship that they will soon realize; Mr. Yates plays a seducer; Mr. Rushworth a foppish fool; Tom Bertram a set of comic roles that reflect his triviality; and Julia, as at Sotherton, is left out. These roles do not so much reconfigure or reveal characters' relationships as offer altered—artificial, "fictional," or "dramatic"—perspectives from which to view them. From this standpoint, the ethical problem with theater has to do with the sense in which it looks like a means of circumventing the rules of the game by allowing characters to act without acting. *Lovers' Vows* allows Mary, Edmund, Henry, and Maria to rehearse desires on which they are not yet prepared to act.[49]

In *A Future for Astyanax*, Leo Bersani calls this kind of novelistic recursivity "significant form," and he argues that "the nineteenth-century novel has trained us to be compulsive pursuers of significant design in fiction."[50] In Bersani's account, the realistic novel is distinguished, on the one hand, by a tendency "to make patterns of meaning from the most isolated and disparate details" and, on the other, by a "structure of meaning . . . powerful enough to collect all the fragments of significance into a single system."[51] In addition to this systemic coherence, he claims that the "shared commitment

to the portentous detail" in writers from Austen and Balzac to Dickens and James denotes an adherence to the idea that "behavior . . . is continuously expressive of character."[52] Every action a character performs is significant because every act in a realistic novel is at least potentially meaningful. Bersani exemplifies the nineteenth-century novel's "commanding structure of significance" with a discussion of "the social dangers of movement" in *Mansfield Park*, arguing that, in contrast to Fanny's "ethic of stillness," "what dooms the Crawfords morally is the ease with which they move around among various, even contradictory sorts of behavior."[53] The Crawfords' movement is both figurative—it reflects their immoral behavior—and literal. Unlike Fanny, who sits silent and invisible on the sofa at the far end of the room, the Crawford are restless. They seem to be always on the move—to and from Mansfield and back and forth between the Grants' cottage and the house. Mary Crawford and Edmund leave Fanny sitting on the bench in the wilderness at Sotherton because Mary "must move"; "resting fatigues [her]" (*MP* 76). As she puts it later in the novel, "I am not born to sit still and do nothing" (*MP* 190).

The Crawfords are the most striking instance of a more general crisis of movement in the novel. "What does it mean not to be able to sit still?" Bersani asks, "Why is movement evil in *Mansfield Park*?"[54] His answer is that the threats posed by the Crawfords and the novel's aborted amateur theatricals are the same.[55] The problem with movement is that it reflects not "the disintegration of order in social life" but "the survival of mere parodies of social order."[56] Acting raises the specter of "an improvised self, or the possibility that there is no 'best self' to which one 'must be true.'"[57] The Crawfords are social actors, and "Mary Crawford is a threat because she reinforces certain social structures without believing in them"; the social order to which she conforms is one "which requires no commitments or beliefs; it asks only for a scrupulous observation of certain forms."[58] In her passivity, Fanny stands (or sits) in opposition to the Crawford's impersonation of social decorum. She is both the stable center of the narrative and also "the moral register of other people's behavior."[59] Her judgment of the Crawfords "discredits them but also guarantees their suitability as intelligible characters in the novel."[60] Bersani reads the "demonstrable continuities" between Fanny's views and Austen's worldview as evidence that the novel's heroine "collaborates with Jane Austen's significant form, in which an episode is always a revealing episode, a contribution to the single meaningful structure of the entire work."[61]

Significant form, as Bersani defines it, names the way novelists like Austen use characters to make their novels make sense.

In the end, for Bersani, the "single system" that organizes the realistic novel is personality, and the patterns that underwrite meaning in the novel are ultimately psychological. On this account, the nineteenth-century novel's goal and endgame is the representation of desire. In *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, he argues, the stillness of Milly Theale and Maggie Verver does not, like Fanny Price's, provide a secure position from which to judge disruptive desire and a means by which to reestablish "an ideal social and novelistic order." Instead, James's heroines draw the men who love them "into a community of passion for which there is no place in the real world, and for which there is no language in realistic fiction." Where Austen narrates the containment of desire, in James, "the resistance to potentially disruptive characters itself disrupts the conditions of realistic fiction."[62] This is why Bersani finds Austen less radical than James, Proust, or Lawrence. Unlike the modern novelist, whose works gesture toward the realization of "disruptive desires . . . by designating their triumph in a region inaccessible to fiction," Austen places desire within a "map of social structures."[63] If desire pushes the novelist beyond the novel's representational capabilities, it follows that its containment, as in *Mansfield Park*, is understood as a perfect fit between novelistic form and the social order it represents. This congruity, rather than politics or ideology, defines Austen's conservatism.

Bersani assumes that Austen's use of the marriage plot is fundamentally approving and argues that the marriages that end her novels embody "the triumph of . . . social forms and traditions."[64] But interpreting the realistic novel's "commitment to the portentous detail" solely in terms of a conception of "continuously expressive" character misses the point of Austen's approach to the marriage plot. What Bersani and many other critics understand as the perfect adequacy of Austen's novels to the social worlds they represent—a correspondence in which the orderly reconfiguration of society is modeled on, and even effected by, the neat resolution of the marriage plot—in fact discloses the novel's most telling departure from real life.[65] The marriage plot is nothing if not an example of pattern, and the fact that it ends with a ritual that corresponds with one that takes place in real life should not blind us to its conventionality and generic specificity. Austen's novels highlight this distinction in their attention to the tension between everyday life and "the visions of romance" (*NA* 146)—a narrative conflict

they repeatedly resolve through the development of their heroines. Catherine Morland is disabused of her gothic daydreams; Marianne Dashwood's high spirits are dampened by disappointment and illness, and her sister Elinor's low spirits are lifted by the unlikely realization of her desires; Elizabeth Bennet is brought to know herself (and her family); Emma Woodhouse's blindness finally yields to George Knightley's insight; and, in a kind of reversal of the pattern (or a return to the variation on the pattern established by Elinor Dashwood), Anne Elliott's resignation yields to a chastened return to romance. In each of these cases, however, the resolution embodied in the protagonist's growth is enabled by a plot that abounds with unlikely events, coincidences, and pure contingencies redeemed by little more than the fact that they take place.[66] In other words, and perhaps this goes without saying, the realistic development of the novelistic character is always shadowed by the arbitrariness of the novel's plot. Or, one might say, character translates contingency into necessity.

Northanger Abbey is particularly attentive to the play of accident and design that characterizes the novel as a genre. After beginning with the claim that "no one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be an heroine" (*NA* 5), by the end of the first chapter, the novel's narrator adumbrates a generic law that supersedes unfavorable circumstances: "When a young lady is to be a heroine . . . [s]omething must and will happen to throw a hero in her way" (*NA* 8). *Northanger Abbey* is punctuated by similar instances of romantic irony, and their cumulative effect is to suggest that the "something" that "must and will happen" to correct the heroine's situation is her insertion into a plot. The narrator's early pronouncement is at once an assertion of the novelist's authorial prerogative and an acknowledgement of the novel's demands, and it is bookended by her parenthetical nod in the last chapter—when she marries Eleanor Tilney off to "the most charming young man in the world," "the very gentleman whose negligent servant left behind the collection of washing-bills" that are the object of Catherine's gothic discovery in chapter 22—to "the rules of composition" that "forbid the introduction of a character not connected with my fable" (*NA* 186). This is the novel's law of conservation—the narratological equivalent of Bersani's "single system." "The rules of composition" suggest that it is plot rather than character that translates contingency into necessity—and, furthermore, that to imagine that the novel is governed by character is to misrecognize the workings of plot.

III.

Thirty years ago, Tony Tanner remarked, "Just what 'society' meant for Jane Austen, it is difficult to establish."[67] He criticized the "tendency to privatize her work and to miss the wider implications of seemingly local events" and highlighted her increasingly distrustful attitude toward anything like "social order."[68] For Tanner, however, this skepticism is a complication rather than a challenge; Austen's commitment to maintaining or restoring social order and social systems remains intact. Her communities are "a microcosm of society," expressive of both the threats to order and possibilities for renewal she believed must be "authentically embodied and enacted if that society was to survive—or deserve to survive."[69] Austen's novels depict the collision between old values and new in order to create a picture of society capable of transforming the danger of radical upheaval into a vision of normal change; their representations of social reality are also allegories of social renewal or decay.[70] The marriage plot novel, because it requires the novelist to generate narrative interest out of an outcome that is, for all intents and purposes, known in advance, is formally as well as ideologically conservative. It takes up the conservative antipathy to change and tells the story of the ongoing effort to accommodate or resist it. Like most critics of the realist novel, Tanner assumes that its structure is fundamentally analogical. Character, style, culture, and history are different ways of describing the novel's alignment with the social world of which it forms a part and to which it refers. The smallest gesture or object and the most insignificant actor in a colonial system each signify within this larger context; every marriage is an instantiation of a marriage culture that is "total."[71] Large narrative patterns and seemingly trivial details reflect the novel's capacity, as Bersani puts it, to "absorb any material . . . into a commanding structure of significance," which in turn grounds the novel as a referential project.[72]

What I have been arguing, by contrast, is that when Austen calls attention to the patterns that organize her narratives or the connections between the components that make them up, she underscores the dividing line between representation and reference. In life, we cannot judge when we are coming to the end of a "story" by attending to "the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are all hastening together to perfect felicity" (*MP* 185). This kind of assurance, or reassurance, is granted only to readers. When Emma and Mr. Knightley's marriage plans are threatened by Mr.

Woodhouse's resistance—"hating change of every kind," for him, "matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable" (*E* 7)—they are saved by the news that Mrs. Weston's poultry house and several others in the neighborhood have been robbed. "Pilfering was *house-breaking* to Mr. Woodhouse's fears," and this translation reconciles him to his daughter's marriage and his new son-in-law and protector's residence at Hartfield (*E* 380). This change, Austen specifies, is effected "not by any sudden illumination of Mr. Woodhouse's mind, or any wonderful change of his nervous system, but by the same operation of the system in another way" (*E* 380). Mr. Woodhouse does not change; the world changes around him and gives him a new object for his fears.

But the joke is not only at Mr. Woodhouse's expense. It also pokes fun at a more general tendency to find great portents in small events—to transform a theft of turkeys into a threat to hearth and home or to treat novelistic fictions as real life. The formalism of the marriage plot is at once more rigorous and less instrumental than the formal realism of the novel as it has traditionally been understood. Conceiving of characters as parts of a plot or narrative functions rather than identities situates them in the context of the stories they inhabit rather than the totalizing social system that is taken to be the novel's ultimate frame of reference. Foregrounding the ways in which plots assemble and reassemble different characters, settings, and situations and discovering new applications for old systems affords a view of narrative as a combination of processes of connection and disconnection. Novels mean by virtue of the operations of plot as well as reference. If plot distinguishes what happens in novels from what happens in real life, for Austen, the marriage plot is more than an attractive subject or a species of narrative that promises "perfect felicity." It is a formula that calls attention to plot as such. Narrative closure, even as it grounds the capacity of characters and actions within a novel to mean, at the same time marks the distance between the novel and social reality—and the marriage plot is narrative closure with a vengeance.

From this standpoint, the distinctive thing about the marriage plot is its self-sufficiency and its adequacy to specifically narrative purposes. The assumption that the significance of realistic representation is referential opens the novel to the world and to particular lines of interpretation, but it also makes it difficult to recognize other possibilities that narrative affords. Austen's descriptions of everyday life might coincide with our experience of our

daily reality (although it is worth noting that for most of her readers they do not and never have), but within the novel they also serve the purpose of fitting out an imaginative world. In this sense, the realistic novel has the capacity to be strangely indifferent to referential meaning. When Scott remarks that *Emma* "offers those who frequent it a pleasure nearly allied with the experience of their own social habits" and claims that Austen's reader "may return from his promenade to the ordinary business of life, without any chance of having his head turned by the recollection of the scene through which he has been wandering," he is in the first place suggesting that nothing of special interest happens in the novel.[73] But his account also opens the possibility that reference might be beside the point. Because the experience of reading Austen is entirely continuous with everyday experience, there is a sense in which the novels have nothing especially pressing to "say" about real life.

One reason it is difficult to establish what society meant for Austen is because we feel that we know her characters so well. The kind of intimacy we experience with their thoughts and feelings and the degree to which we assume their perspectives (even when Austen reminds us of the distance between where we stand and where they stand) make it hard to see the novels as anything other than representations of individual experience. This commitment to the individual is at once a function of the centrality of free indirect discourse to Austen's novels and perhaps an explanation for its centrality to Austen criticism. A critic like Watt saw Austen's management of the relationships between characters, narrators, and readers as the source of "a sense of social order which is not achieved at the expense of the individuality and autonomy of her characters."[74] For critics of the novel influenced by Foucault, such accounts precisely describe the ideological work of free indirect style. What was for Watt the voice of "some august and impersonal spirit of social and psychological understanding" is revealed as a technique of social control.[75] From this perspective, free indirect discourse does not do violence to characters' individuality and autonomy; it exposes individuality and autonomy as the ideological effects of discursive regimes.[76]

A similar antithesis characterizes the most significant recent accounts of Austen's use of free indirect discourse. Frances Ferguson criticizes discursive or ideological approaches for subsuming the individual in the collective; such accounts "can identify a social collective, but only in such a way as to make all individuals who are part of it look as if they ought to be relatively interchangeable."[77] By contrast, Ferguson argues, Austen's use of free indi-

rect style discloses "what we might want to think of as a communal contribution to individuals," while still "recogniz[ing] the pressure that this formation exerts on individuality."[78] Her reading of the marriage plot in *Emma* suggests that the novel's interest in games and its treatment of marriage as a social game (which seems "more likely . . . to issue in everyone's marrying everyone else than in marriage between two persons") at once acknowledge and (in envisioning marriage as an intimate withdrawal from the public sphere) ultimately reject the threat posed by the social system.[79] Miller's account of free indirect discourse as "an epistemological advantage over character" offers a radically different understanding of "what being a character in Austen means: to be slapped silly by a narration whose constant battering, however satisfying—or terrifying—to readers, its recipient is kept from ever noticing. After all, how would even the cleverest character divine that he or she is *being narrated*?"[80] The absurdity of Miller's question reflects the sense in which, for him, free indirect discourse makes impossible experiences possible.[81] As Austen practices it, the technique takes narration "as near to a character's psychic and linguistic reality as it can get without collapsing into it."[82] It is "given over to broaching an impossible identification. In the paradoxical form of an impersonal intimacy, it grants us at one and the same time the experience of a character's inner life as she herself lives it, and an experience of the same inner life as she never could."[83] For Miller, what is impossible about these experiences is their virtuality; they can be entertained only through close reading or "*close writing*" (his term for Austen's use of free indirect style).[84] The agency Ferguson preserves in Austen's characters Miller reinscribes in her readers.

It is striking, although perhaps not surprising, that a narrative technique that operates by choreographing opposing forces—self and society, individual and community, character and narration—generates antithetical readings. What is surprising is how difficult it seems for formal analysis of the novel to remain formal. As Ferguson observes, despite its claims to be a "universal method," formalist criticism is generally considered to be more effective in its treatment of poetry than of prose.[85] But her account of the force of form in *Emma* concludes by suggesting that its purpose is the representation of "an intimacy so intense" that it leaves public forms of reference behind.[86] It would appear that even free indirect discourse finally serves the realist novel's commitment to conceptualizing characters as fully realized individuals. Along similar lines, Miller's emphasis on the impersonality of

Austen's style is belied by analyses of the novels that transform close reading into a peculiarly intense form of personal communion with the author.[87] Alex Woloch's account of the "character-system" of the realist novel offers an even more dramatic example of the irresistibility of this recourse to the person and the personal. Despite his claim that relationships between major and minor characters are a crucial structural feature of the novel—that literary characterization operates within a "distributional matrix" in which "the discrete representation of any specific individual is intertwined with the narrative's continual apportioning of attention to different characters who jostle for limited space within the same fictional universe"—Woloch's readings perpetually devolve into talking about characters as though they were real people.[88] The jostling for narrative space among fictional characters in a novel becomes a representation of the jostling among actual persons for representation in the social world.[89]

I am not arguing that the critical recourse to personal identity and a referential understanding of novelistic representation is wrong in every instance. The realist novel obviously encourages and sustains this kind of attention, and our sympathetic involvement in the "lives" of fictional characters is undoubtedly one of the form's greatest achievements. But it counts as an achievement at least in part because of the tremendous difficulty of deploying the techniques of fiction in such a way as to elicit responses that feel, and in fact are, real. Austen was intensely aware of the difficulty, and sometimes the absurdity, of trying to square the relationship between the novel and the social reality that is its ostensible subject. In her defense of the novel and novel reading in *Northanger Abbey*, she rejects the claims of critics who argue that novels compete with reality by misleading their "young, ignorant, and idle" readers.[90] But she also argues for the seriousness and moral utility of the novel in a novel that revolves around the education of a heroine who is led astray in precisely the way the novel's critics charged. This kind of self-reflexive commentary on the boundary between fiction and reality tells us something important about what "society" meant for Austen. The patterning of action on which the novel depends—which Austen so insistently figures and which life writing in general cannot avoid—is at once the basis for understanding the novel as a "microcosm" of society—for imagining that realistic fiction has a particular purchase on social reality—and at the same time undermines that claim by creating fictional worlds whose coherence and closure allow them to stand apart.

Austen is unbothered by the postmodern abyss that this contradiction might be understood to open. Instead, out of the closure of the marriage plot she fashions a form of realistic representation that simultaneously invites reference to social reality and identifies the social as "a region inaccessible to fiction."[91] It is the closure of the novel—the sense in which novels are thought to be "hermetically sealed" or imagined to contain desire—that at once separates it from society and constitutes the form's most powerful contribution to understanding the social world.[92] It is difficult to say just what "society" meant for Jane Austen because her novels simultaneously depict small, closed "societies" and yet come to understand the social as a function of the distance between the novel and social reality. The social, for Austen as for Latour, is not "a stabilized state of affairs" or "a type of material" but "a movement during a process of assembling."[93] The novel's capacity to give these movements narrative form at once holds out the promise that they might be represented in such a way as to embody the individual's social experience and forecloses that possibility by inscribing them within a closed system that stands at a remove from the world of connections and disconnections to which it refers but cannot contain. The analogy between the novel and society that informs so many readings of realism regards both as self-sustaining wholes, but, in so doing, it treats the social world as given in advance and its novelistic embodiment as just that and nothing more. In Austen, the closure of the marriage plot highlights the inadequacy of viewing society as a total system, as though it were a narrative that, while accommodating variation, finally adhered to a single structure. Austen's novels make use of plotted action and narrative form not to provide a picture of society but to make visible the forms of association and other forces that hold it together.

The distance between fiction and social reality, predicated on the closure of the novel and effected by the resolution of the marriage plot, might be regarded as a failure of realism. But, for Austen, the idea of the novel as a closed system becomes the means not only to represent but to take the measure of social reality. Society, Austen recognizes, is not a coherent whole; it is subject to accidents and arbitrariness that no desire for coherence or drive to systematize can rationalize. But because social reality always lies beyond the novel's horizon, the formal demand that novels contain the excesses they ostensibly represent—that they accommodate every detail and make every movement legible—in turn marks the "extraterritoriality" of the social itself. Understood in this way, the realist novel defines the social by negation

as an open-ended collection of movements and processes toward which literary representation can gesture but that it cannot comprehend. Austen comments most pointedly on what society means in the articulation of a conception of the marriage plot that refuses the notion that society possesses any comparably well-shaped form. The novel is a repudiation of the idea of social form.

Chapter 6

De Quincey's Systems

> For all purposes of frightening us, anomalies
> in systems so vast are as good as a ghost.
>
> —Thomas De Quincey, "System of the Heavens"

In a famous passage in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821), Thomas De Quincey describes a set of plates from Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Imaginary Prisons*.[1] The drawings represent "vast Gothic halls," loaded with "all sort of engines and machinery . . . expressive of enormous power put forth, and resistance overcome." A staircase rises up along the walls, with Piranesi himself "groping his way upwards" (70). The stairs end abruptly, with no visible exit, "except into the depths below," but, higher up the walls, another flight of stairs, and another Piranesi, appears, and, still higher, another and another, "and so on, until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both are lost in the upper gloom of the hall." For De Quincey, these impossible designs represent the "power of endless growth and self-reproduction"; the same power informs the architecture of his own dreams (71). Fueled by opium, they become "nightly spectacles" in which space and time are transformed: "Buildings, landscapes, &c. were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive. Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity" (68). More striking than the extension of space is "the vast expansion of time": "70 or 100 years," even "a millennium," seem to pass in a single night, and a fragment of a day comes to encompass feelings "of a duration far beyond the limits of any human experience" (68).

In one sense, this nightmarish account of Piranesi's images reflects De Quincey's vision of the mind as palimpsest—"the dread book of account," in

which "there is no such thing as *forgetting*" (69). The mind's "secret inscriptions" are permanent; "just as the stars seem to withdraw before the common light of day," they endure even when they are invisible to "our present consciousness" (69). The image of Piranesi, multiple Piranesis, climbing the staircase, figures both this persistence and, when they disappear into the "upper gloom," the veiling of the mind's inscriptions. As the "engines and machinery" that stand on the floor of the hall suggest, however, De Quincey's image is also a picture of *production*: the figure of Piranesi groping his way up the stairs combines an Escher-like self-referentiality and an autopoietic drive. The power it imagines is that of a system that perpetuates itself—even beyond the limits of our power to perceive it.

Systems of various kinds were among De Quincey's obsessions, and he returned to the idea of system again and again over the course of his career as a writer. He was interested in a range of systems—of communication and public transport, publication, politics, economics, astronomy, the arts (especially music), and the mind. But, just as important, De Quincey's thought was animated by a drive to systematize—to treat institutions, entities, or practices as though they were made up of interconnecting parts whose distinctive features and attributes are amenable to discursive analysis. His characteristic analytical procedure is to begin with an intuition about an underlying logic or structure and then to pursue it so relentlessly that logical analysis crosses over into irrational obsession. De Quincey himself seemed to understand his drug addiction as the reflection of a desire for order—in the *Confessions*, he remarks that, "whereas wine disorders the mental faculties, opium . . . introduces amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony" (40)—and suggested that the same impulse fueled his interest in political economy: "Though it is eminently an organic science (no part, that is to say, but what acts on the whole, as the whole re-acts on each part), yet the several parts may be detached and contemplated singly" (65).

This chapter examines De Quincey's thinking about systems in a range of essays on disparate topics written over the course of the 1840s. It begins with his linked accounts of the publication system and the transport system, focusing on "The English Mail-Coach, or The Glory of Motion," and then turns to his writings on political economy and consideration of the solar system in the essay "System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes." Publication and transport are linked for De Quincey because these systems appear to be coextensive with the emerging mass public and seem

to offer a means of comprehending a society that was felt to be increasingly fragmented. In "The English Mail-Coach," the mail comes to serve as a figure for social systems in general, but the real interest of the essay has to do with the way De Quincey pushes this observation to its limits and beyond. Along similar lines, in his Ricardian critique of contemporary economic theory, De Quincey introduces the variables of space and time into the closed system of political economy—and confronts a fundamental problem of systems in general. Although it addresses a seemingly unrelated topic, "System of the Heavens" extends this analysis of systems failure by taking recent discoveries in stellar astronomy as the occasion for exploring the implications of the expansion of space and time as well as radical shifts of scale.

De Quincey's understanding of systems—both as they are embodied in institutions or social practices and as they govern attempts to analyze those structures—makes him a representative post-Enlightenment figure. For De Quincey, the system is not merely an explanation or cause—the distinctively modern "SYSTEM" that Clifford Siskin argues we've learned to blame—but the ever-receding horizon of our social life.[2] In addition, in light of both the widespread perception that modern social life is permeated at every level by systems and the recent literary-theoretical interest in "deep time," De Quincey's discovery—made repeatedly, over the course of his writing life, in a range of texts—that the systematizing impulse is at once impossible to satisfy and impossible to escape offers a revealing perspective on our own critical moment.

I.

In "Style," which appeared in *Blackwood's* in four parts between July 1840 and February 1841, De Quincey opens a discussion of the modern publication system with the following question:

> Did the reader ever happen to reflect on the great idea of *publication*? An idea we call it; because even in our own times, with all the mechanic aids of steam-presses, &c., this object is most imperfectly approached and is destined, perhaps, for ever to remain an unattainable ideal.[3]

Publication is "a *sine qua non* condition for the generation of literature"—it reflects the writer's desire for "a larger sympathy than that of his own personal circle"—and yet remains, at least in the idealized form that De Quincey calls "universal publication," "a hopeless idea"—especially for the modern

writer (232). Perversely, it is print itself that undermines publication. In Pericles's Athens, De Quincey argues, authors and orators enjoyed a perfect relationship with their audiences. Dramas and speeches reached a larger proportion of the population than modern publication could ever provide; moreover, they were heard rather than read, and, supplemented by "voice, gesture, scenery, music," were immune to "false reading or careless reading" (237).

De Quincey's ideal, it turns out, is publication without print. Compared to "the press of Athens," modern print is a false promise. The notion that print preserves texts for future readers is a "delusion, by which all parties disguise the truth." "Believe it not!" he exclaims. "Every month, every day indeed, produces its own novelties, with the additional zest that they are novelties. Every future year, which will assuredly fail in finding time for its own books.—how should it find time for defunct books? No, no; every year buries its own literature" (233). De Quincey was not alone in regarding modern print as an enemy of literature. In "The Mutability of Literature," from *The Sketch Book* (1819), Washington Irving conjured up the bitter complaints of a "little thick quarto" "intended to circulate from hand to hand . . . but . . . clasped up for more than two centuries" in the library of Westminster Abbey.[4] The seventeenth-century book wakes up and begins to speak, "railing about the neglect of the world—about merit being suffered to languish in obscurity" (130). "I was written for all the world," the book complains, "not for the bookworms of an abbey" (131). The "little quarto" is surprised to learn that it is not only volumes of religious polemic like itself that have been forgotten, but also Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, Sackville's plays, *The Mirror for Magistrates*, and John Lyly's *Euphues*. "Wave after wave of succeeding literature has rolled over them," Irving's narrator, Geoffrey Crayon informs him, "until they are buried so deep, that it is only now and then that some industrious diver after fragments of antiquity brings up a specimen for the gratification of the curious" (135). Crayon describes the fading of older literature as "a wise precaution of Providence"—a natural process akin to the succession of human generations in which "the works of genius and learning decline and make way for their successors" (135). Even more explicitly than De Quincey, Irving holds "the inventions of print and the press" (135–36) responsible for the "excessive multiplication" (135) that besets the contemporary literary world. Rather than preserving books for future readers, modern publication has upset the natural cycle of literary succession: it has "made everyone a writer" (136). "The consequences are alarming. The stream

of literature is swollen into a torrent—augmented into a river—expanded into a sea" (136).

In Irving, as in De Quincey, the modern methods of publication ("steam presses, &c.") promise the general dissemination of printed texts but instead produce what De Quincey calls "the inequality of . . . publication." More books mean fewer readers for each. "One condition of publication defeats another," as "the very multiplication of books" has "the practical result" of "continually deceasing" the "average quotient of publicity for each." Even worse, "very many books [are] absolutely without a reader," and many of those that are read are read badly.[5] The only remedy Irving's "choleric" quarto can imagine is a "rule" that would require the dean of Westminster Abbey to "pay each of us a visit at least once a year."[6] That more books means fewer readers for each becomes especially clear in De Quincey's account of periodical publication. Rather than reflecting the diversity and range of the modern reading public, De Quincey argues that periodicals instead embody a widely shared delusion about print:

> Popular journals . . . which carry a promiscuous miscellany of papers into the same number of hands, as a stage-coach must convey all its passengers at the same rate of speed, dupe the public with a notion that here at least all are read. Not at all. One or two are read from the interest attached to their subjects. Occasionally one is read a little from the ability with which it treats a subject not otherwise attractive. . . . A hasty glance may be taken by one in a hundred at the less attractive papers; but reading is out of the question.
>
> (232–33)

Periodicals create the illusion that everyone who buys a journal reads everything in it. The reality, of course, is that readers don't read journals from cover to cover. Rather than expanding readership, getting an article into the hands of a large number of readers increases the number of readers who will have the chance to ignore it. Held up as examples of the unprecedented extent and appetite of the modern reading audience, popular journals in fact bring into focus "the most monstrous forms" of modern publication (232). Under the conditions De Quincey describes, in which "reading is out of the question," publication is a horizon of impossibility rather than possibility.

What, then, aside from disabusing us of our illusions and breeding authorial disillusionment, is the point of reflecting on "the great idea of *publication*"? In "Style," the idea of publication becomes a way of thinking about

the public; it is "useful," De Quincey claims, "(like all ideals) in the way of regulating our aims, but also as a practicable object not reconcilable with the limitation of human power" (232). The figure of the stage coach probes these limitations by diverging from its apparent meaning. If the simile seems at first to suggest that journals deliver articles to readers just as coaches deliver passengers to their destinations, it actually constructs a rather convoluted comparison in which periodicals carry articles "into the same number of hands" just as the coach carries "all its passengers at the same rate of speed." The tenor of the metaphor conflates velocity and distribution. What passengers riding the same coach share, in other words, is a temporality rather than a destination. Like the "readers" of popular journals, who pick and choose from "a promiscuous miscellany of papers," reading what they will and ignoring the rest, passengers on the stage have different destinations. Some get off at the first stop, some remain on the coach until the last; some readers read more, some less. The simple fact of widespread distribution does not guarantee every paper a reader. In the end, through the errant figure of the stage, De Quincey registers a collective delusion about the existence of a general audience ("here at least all are read"). The speed of modern publication mirrors the pace of modern life, but far from forging connections between authors and readers, it reflects the very disconnections it is imagined to alleviate.

The misconception figured by the stage has its source in the widely shared assumption that the multiplication of books and expansion of the reading public are not just linked developments but forces in equilibrium. More than merely pointing out a mistake or a philosophical curiosity, in "Style" De Quincey captures the powerful sense in which this deluded conception of publication underwrites mistaken views about the coherence and comprehensibility of the social world. Publication, he intimates, has become a figure for society itself, and the system of modern publication, in which accelerated supply is imagined to meet unprecedented demand, is offered to describe not only relations between authors and readers but social relations more generally. It is a system that seems to make sense of the mass public by comprehending a social world that is believed to be increasingly disordered. De Quincey's account of "the great idea of *publication*" reveals the distance between the system and the object it is imagined, wrongly, to describe.

The figural relationship between public transport and publication introduced in "Style" is at the center of "The English Mail-Coach, or The Glory of

Motion" (published in two installments in *Blackwood's* in 1849). In "The English Mail-Coach," however, traveling by stage is more than a metaphor. Instead, as "the national organ for publishing" the "mighty events" of the Napoleonic Wars, the mail coach is at once a figure for publication and the vehicle by which the news is published.[7] Over the course of the essay, the mail's literal function amplifies its figurative significance, as its "awful political mission" transforms it into "a spiritualized and glorified object to the impassioned heart." In becoming an idealized emblem of the British nation, the "mail-coach system" seems to realize the promise of universal publication (184). The mail links distant stations and distributes news of national interest; it connects and coordinates individuals "through the conscious presence of a central intellect . . . into one steady co-operation in a national result" (183). The "grand national sympathy" it engenders defeats distance and national difference by linking center and periphery, making strangers into brothers and sisters, and erasing distinctions of class, gender, and age (205). Divisions external and internal are left behind in favor of a shared purpose and a common point of reference—effecting a subordination of self to nation that appears even to overcome such De Quinceyean bugbears as the conflicts between self and other, inside and outside.[8]

Recent criticism on "The English Mail-Coach" has emphasized these themes. Critics have argued that the mail isn't merely an image of the nation but an agent that helps create national unity. It does so less by spreading the news of British military victories than by mediating between individuals otherwise separated by geographical distance and cultural difference.[9] By classifying the mail among the media, these readings highlight the affinities between De Quincey's representation of the mail and Benedict Anderson's conception of the nation as imagined community.[10] The logic of the mail, like that of the novel or the newspaper, is structured by "temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar."[11] The mail's daily timetable and schedule resemble the "mass ceremony" of newspaper reading, "incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar."[12] Anderson emphasizes the paradoxical character of this ritual—it is at once intensely personal and the foundation of a new form of public consciousness—and, for De Quincey, the mail is similarly double. It brings people together, but also, through its dissemination of the news, extends its reach beyond those who feel its immediate effect. As he puts it, the mail coach "has an obscure effect of multiplying the victory itself, by multiplying to the imagination into infinity the stages of its

progressive diffusion"; it sets in motion a ripple effect that resonates throughout the nation, creating "a sort of visionary sympathy with the approaching sympathies, yet unborn, which we were going to evoke" (204).

For Anderson, the temporality of the imagined community is the "meanwhile" of the novel and the newspaper. De Quincey's nation, by contrast, partakes of the simultaneity of the divine: on the one hand, Benjamin's "homogenous, empty time"; on the other, "Messianic time."[13] As in Erich Auerbach's account of time in the Old Testament, on the mail, "the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and which will be fulfilled in the future."[14] For De Quincey, "always" means something like "from time immemorial" —the temporality of Burke's ancient constitution—and the fulfillment he imagines similarly empties the present moment, gesturing toward a Wordsworthian "something evermore about to be."[15] "The English Mail-Coach" captures the convergence of the here and now and the eternal in sublime experiences that range from Burkean danger and obscurity—"grand effects for the eye between lamp-light and the darkness upon solitary roads" (183)—to the "obscure effect" of multiplication produced by the mail's diffusion of the news, a near-rehearsal of Kant's mathematical sublime (204). But the sublime is more than an imagistic backdrop for the essay. By connecting objective power and subjective experience, the encounters with sublimity De Quincey describes situate the individual in a present moment in which the everyday and the eternal intersect.

In terms of the spatial schema employed by Auerbach and Anderson, De Quincey conceptualizes the nation as the intersection of the horizontal and the vertical. We might understand the mail's strange double character as both artificial system and natural body along the same lines. John Palmer "invented" mail coaches, but, in the essay's elaborate opening figure, he also "discovered" them—just as Galileo "did certainly invent (or, which is same thing, discover) the satellites of Jupiter, those very next things extant to mail-coaches in the two capital pretensions of speed and keeping time" (183). From the outset, the mail is imagined to be simultaneously bureaucratic and organic: "To my own feeling, this Post-office service recalled some mighty orchestra, where a thousand instruments, all disregarding each other, and so far in danger of discord, yet all obedient as slaves to the supreme *baton* of some great leader, terminate in a perfection of harmony like that of heart, veins, and arteries, in a healthy animal organization" (183).[16] This organi-

cism is the key to the mail's ability to serve as both a figure for national unity and the technology that brings it into being. The relationship between the mail coach and the postal service is synecdochic—both are centers for larger webs of connections—and the harmony they create is, in an important sense, a bodily experience. Like Wordsworth's memory of Tintern Abbey, the effect of the mail is "felt in the blood, and felt along the heart."[17] Unlike "the modern modes of travelling," riding the mail transmits the feeling of speed. The railroad is a means to an end; its velocity is "a fact of our lifeless knowledge, resting upon *alien* evidence." The mail, by contrast, is an extension of the self: "Seated on the mail-coach," De Quincey observes, "we needed no evidence out of ourselves to indicate the velocity" (193). If, "on the new system of travelling, iron tubes and boilers have disconnected man's heart from the ministers of his locomotion," on the mail speed is "heard," "[seen]," and "felt" (194). Like the literature of power (whose function, as De Quincey defines it in opposition to the literature of knowledge, "is—*to move*"), the mail coach "speaks ultimately . . . to the higher understanding or reason, but always *through* affections of pleasure and sympathy."[18]

In a series of essays published in *Tait's Magazine* in 1834, De Quincey develops a version of this organic metaphor in which the political aims critics have attributed to "The English Mail-Coach" are crystalized. "Travelling in England in Old Days" offers an account of a "revolution in the whole apparatus, means, machinery, and dependencies of" "our travelling system."[19] De Quincey frames his history of the system by asking the reader to imagine the following scene:

> Conceive of a state of communication between the centre and the extremities of a great people, kept up with a uniformity of reciprocation so exquisite, as to imitate the flowing and ebbing of the sea, the systole and diastole of the human heart; day and night, waking and sleeping, not succeeding to each other with more absolute certainty than the acts of the metropolis and the controlling notice of the provinces, whether in the way of support or of resistance. Action and re-action from every point of the compass being thus perfect and instantaneous, we should then first begin to understand, in a practical sense, what is meant by the unity of a political body, and we should approach to a more adequate appreciation of the powers which are latent in organisation.[20]

The reciprocity pictured in this passage is as natural as the flowing of the tides or beating of the heart; messages are sent and received just as surely as

day follows night. De Quincey envisions a communications system that is capable of overcoming the "bars of space and time" and whose ultimate effect will be "a political system truly *organic—i.e.,* in which each acts upon all, and all react upon each: and a new earth will arise from the indirect agency of this merely physical revolution."[21] The creation of this "system of intercourse" will make the body politic more like a real body, and instantaneous communication will finally enable the full expression of "the national will."[22] But the realization of De Quincey's dream is deferred to a distant and uncertain future. Even the electric telegraph is only a "prefiguration" of "some great secret yet to come in the art of distant communication."[23] The problem with the telegraph is perhaps its immateriality; like the literature of knowledge, it speaks to the understanding or reason by bypassing the body. The mail's embodied reality makes it a fitter emblem of this imagined revolution than the immateriality of telegraphic communication.[24] But the superannuation of the mail—and the willful anachronism of celebrating the speed of mail coaches after the advent of the railroad—suggests that the future De Quincey envisioned was no closer in 1849 than it had been fifteen years before.

It's tempting to read the apocalyptic ending of "The English Mail-Coach" as De Quincey's final word on the matter—an admission that the visions of romance were over. Most commentators have read the essay this way, and I don't want to contest their conclusions. Instead, I would simply point out that De Quincey had done this before (most notably in the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*) and propose that the real interest of "The English Mail-Coach" lies elsewhere. Emphasizing the essay's trajectory toward its catastrophic conclusion glosses over its ornately satiric account of what De Quincey calls "mail-coach society" (188). Regarding the early descriptions of riding the mail as resources for the nightmarish images of the essay's second installment follows De Quincey's lead; this is how he characteristically treats his own memories—as fuel for sublime visions. The *Confessions* establishes the pattern, and structural affinities between the two texts are obvious. But an interpretation guided by De Quincey's conception of the mind as palimpsest necessarily understands this resemblance as evidence of the central importance of the essay's concluding sections. The materials that feed into the dream fugue, in other words, however interesting or diverting, must finally assume a somewhat arbitrary significance. The chain of associations that leads the mind from one recollected scene to the next takes precedence over the individual images and episodes that make up the chain, and the signifi-

cance of any particular story has primarily to do with how it fuels these otherwise random associations.

The problem with this reading is that, however convincing in general terms, it fails to attend to the essay's most compelling details. It transforms the series of episodes and investigations that make up the bulk of the first installment into De Quinceyean digressions—ballast that must be discarded before the essay can ascend to its apocalyptic conclusion. Attending to these "digressions" admittedly works against the grain; it is a procedure predicated to some degree on a refusal to take the essay's "serious" tropes seriously. What this refusal discloses, however, is that De Quincey's interest in the mail has as much to do with the organizational structures it reveals as the feelings it evokes. The first part of the essay is composed of a series of carefully choreographed scenes and anecdotes that revolve around the mail coach and examine the composition of mail-coach society. Like English society, mail-coach society has its classes, politics, fads and fashions, love affairs, comedies and tragedies. It is, in short, a microcosm. More than that, however, this society is organized around the mail and operates in accordance with its architecture, schedules, and routines. Because of the visibility of its arrangements, it is legible in ways that everyday society is not. Read this way, the mail is less an image of national unity than a technology for analyzing society as a system.[25]

De Quincey's picture of mail-coach society recalls his student days at Oxford and focuses on what he calls "the executive details of the system" (185). By "executive details," he doesn't mean schedules and timetables, routes and maps as much as the ad hoc arrangements with which "Mr Palmer had no concern." Specifically, he is interested in the "bye-laws not unreasonable, enacted by posting-houses for their own benefit, and . . . others equally stern" devised by the mail-coach passengers themselves (185). These rules are not essential to the mail service, but they govern its operation on the ground—and define the social experience of those who ride it. If the mail coach service is orchestrated by "a central intellect," mail-coach society elaborates principles of organization that manage not coaches but persons (188). It is a system within a system—an exercise in self-government framed but not determined by a central bureaucracy.

The ostensible goal of the "bye-laws" by which mail-coach passengers govern themselves is to separate the "four inside people" from the "outsides"—to maintain a distinction that marks a class difference. Those who ride in-

side the coach pay for the privilege, and De Quincey gleefully delineates the "extravagant shapes" in which "the aristocratic element in [England's] social composition" expresses itself—first by separating the insiders, "a porcelain variety of the human race," from "the three miserable delf ware outsides" and then in progressively more elaborate figures. "Even to have kicked an outsider might have been held to attaint the foot concerned in that operation, so that, perhaps, it would have required an act of parliament to restore the purity of blood." For the "three outsides, the trinity of Pariahs," to attempt to sit down at breakfast or dinner "with the consecrated four" amounts to an act of "treason." These images of tainted blood, parliamentary exorcism, and treason at the breakfast table suggest that De Quincey's depiction of mail-coach society is a parable of class prejudice. The rules "enacted by the inside passengers for the illustration of their own exclusiveness," it would seem, make a mockery the very idea of self-government (185).

But the stability of this interpretation is upset by a "great practical difficulty": De Quincey and his fellow Oxford students, "the most aristocratic of people," prefer to ride outside, on the top of the mail coach. They desire "the air, the freedom of prospect, the proximity of the horses, the elevation of the seat," and, "above all, the certain anticipation of purchasing occasional opportunities of driving." Becoming "outsides," however, means losing their status as "insides." The dilemma prompts "a searching inquiry into the true quality and valuation of the different apartments of the mail"—an inquiry "conducted . . . on metaphysical principles" (186); its conclusion is nothing less than a "revolution . . . in the constitution of mail-coach society" (188). In a radical departure from a custom that De Quincey dates back to the first public carriages in the late seventeenth century, "it was ascertained satisfactorily, that the roof of the coach, which some had affected to call the attics, and some the garrets, was really the drawing-room; whilst it appeared that the inside, which had been traditionally regarded as the only room tenantable by gentlemen, was, in fact, the coal-cellar in disguise" (186–87). The result of this searching metaphysical inquiry is the revaluation of the places on the mail: it is at once a renovation (the outside becomes the drawing room; the inside, the cellar) and a reversal (outside becomes inside). Revolution turns the mail upside down and inside out.

De Quincey illustrates his account of revolution with an anecdote about George III's presentation of a state coach to the emperor of China that, in effect, turns the world upside down. Unfamiliar with the coach's mode of

operation, and ignoring the British ambassador's explanation, "a cabinet council on the grand state question, 'Where was the emperor to sit?'" concludes that the box, as the "most elevated" and "foremost" seat, must be "the imperial place, and, *for the scoundrel who drove, he might sit where he could find a perch*" (187). After a brief trial run, with the emperor on the box and the coachman driving blindly from inside, the coach is abandoned and "dedicated for ever as a votive offering to the God Fo, Fo—whom the learned more accurately call Fi, Fi" (188). De Quincey claims that young Oxford's revolution in mail-coach society is "of this same Chinese character" (188), but the two transformations are in fact antithetically opposed. In the *Confessions*, China is connected with the episode of the Malay, another story of a gift gone awry, and southern Asia is "the seat of awful images and associations." In these nightmare visions, masses of human beings meld with "all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants," and human agency gives way to the primordial workings of nature. "The mere antiquity of Asiatic things, of their institutions, histories, modes of faith, &c. is so impressive, that to me the vast age of the race and name overpowers the sense of youth in an individual. A young Chinese seems to me an antediluvian man renewed."[26] For the Opium Eater, these "Asiatic scenes" express the horror of stagnation and the loss of personal identity (72). In "The English Mail-Coach," the Chinese revolution is similarly opposed to change. It rejects the new and unfamiliar by relegating it to the status of ritual object, asserting the superiority not only of the emperor to the coach driver, but of the coach's symbolic value to its utility. Absolutism denies the possibility of novelty by assimilating it to a system ruled by an old god (with funny names).

When De Quincey claims that the transformation of mail-coach society is "a perfect French revolution," he approaches social change from the opposite direction (188). The mail-coach revolution perfects its French archetype; its perfection marks its distance from how this matter is ordered in France.[27] It is ideal because it is British and bloodless. Rather than leveling social distinctions, it revalues hierarchy while maintaining its structure. The mail coach is not destroyed or materially altered; it is reoccupied and transfigured. This reappropriation radically alters the mail's meaning but leaves the categories that govern its significance intact.[28] As in France, the revolution is an uprising from below (paradoxically, however, from atop the mail), but its particularly British genius is that it transforms an established system from within rather than imposing a new one from without. At the same

time, the mail-coach revolution solves the riddle that thwarted the emperor's advisors by restoring the proper relationship between the mail's status as symbol and the lived experience of its passengers. Young Oxford, "addicted to the practice of looking down superciliously even upon the insides themselves as often very suspicious characters," now looks down, literally and figuratively, on the passengers riding inside the coach. The Britishness of the revolution's perfection is confirmed when it is ratified by the market, as "the public took to bribing" for the privilege of riding on the box-seat, until "the whole corporation was constantly bribed, rebribed, and often surrebribed" (188). China has its emperor; France its rights of man; Britain its commercial system. In pitting China against France, De Quincey's account of the mail allegorizes the limits of both absolutism and radical democracy, hidebound tradition and rational centralization. Mail-coach society takes shape within the framework established by Mr. Palmer's postal service, but it applies, elaborates, and revises the system's laws in ways that at once amplify their organizational structure and contest their authority. The process De Quincey describes, in which mail-coach passengers refine the management of the service and revalue its social significance, identifies the mail as a self-regulating system operating in the realm of the social.[29]

The first installment of "The English Mail-Coach" concludes with a shift in genre, as the essay moves from the social comedy of the mail to the romance of Fanny of the Bath Road. This episode alters the scale of De Quincey's analysis by turning from the public world of the national postal service to the private realm of love. At the same time, however, this account of De Quincey's affair with "the loveliest young woman" he had ever known elaborates his revaluation of revolution by taking the spatialized figure of the mail, which turns society inside out and upside down, and setting it in motion. The most striking feature of De Quincey's relationship with Fanny is that it takes place over the course of years and revolves, quite literally, around the mail. More than a nostalgic reflection on lost love, De Quincey's account of Fanny of the Bath Road is an attempt to imagine such a system as it operates *in time*. The lovers meet on the London mail coach's regular stops on the Bath road, and De Quincey woos Fanny over the "seven or eight years" he rode the Bath and Bristol mail (197). The relationship is periodic affair, and both the frequency and the duration of their encounters are functions of the mail service schedule. He makes "as much love as one can make whilst the mail is changing horses, a process," he explains, "which ten years

later did not occupy above eighty seconds; but *then*, viz. about Waterloo, it occupied five times eighty. Now, four hundred seconds offer a field quite ample enough for whispering into a young woman's ear a great deal of truth; and . . . some trifle of falsehood" (196). The affair unfolds "entirely on mail-coach allowance—timed, in reality, by the General Post Office" (197).

That the mail delivers the lover to his beloved (and her to him) and serves as the setting for their courtship might seem like circumstantial details. But De Quincey insists that the mail service is more than merely the context or occasion for the affair. Instead, it makes the relationship possible—the mail, he suggests, contributes as much to the liaison as the lovers do.[30] When he wonders what might have come of his love of "the beautiful and ingenuous girl . . . had it not been for the Bath and Bristol mail," it sounds as though he regrets that circumstances tore them apart. But rather than getting in the lovers' way, the mail's "severe course of *timing* and periodical interruption" is in fact responsible for the success of the affair. Their "very numerous" but "very brief" encounters prevent De Quincey from falling out of love or making foolish overtures, and the mail's management of the relationship stops him from compromising his interests or "misleading . . . hers." The mail thus allows him "to do a thing which few people ever *can* have done—viz., to make love for seven years," and he credits his sincerity as a lover to its mediation. "People talk of being over head and ears in love—," he writes, "now, the mail was the cause that I sank only over ears in love, which, you know, still left a trifle of brain to overlook the whole conduct of the affair." This "trifle of brain" is all that separates De Quincey from a madman, and the mail's role in preserving it prompts him to suggest that just as the mentally incompetent "are held to be under the guardianship of Chancery, so the man making love . . . ought to be made a ward of the General Post-Office" (197).

The periodicity of mail-coach time is crucial to the story: the mail's regular stops enable both the affair and its comprehension. But if the love story suggests that slowing time in this way is salutary, De Quincey's absurd depiction of the mail coachman, Fanny's grandfather, points to the nightmarish possibility of stopping time altogether. The grandfather mail coachman is entangled with De Quincey's Asiatic nightmares: at first merely a generic obstacle to the love affair, he becomes a representative of a more powerful, and primordial, form of obstruction. In his movements, "our grandpapa" resembles a crocodile, with whom he shares "a monstrous inaptitude for turning

round" (due to "the absurd *breadth* of his back," as opposed to "the absurd *length*" of the crocodile's) (196). Like the crocodile, he "does *not* change . . . he is a slow coach" (198). De Quincey's relationship with Fanny develops not only under her grandfather's watchful eye, but behind his back—and we are called upon to picture a scene in which the lovers' desire (or De Quincey's at least) is figured by their revolutions, as they move around both the stationary coach and the slowly revolving coachman. The lovers and their antagonist describe a system in which two bodies orbit a third that in turn rotates on its own (ample) axis, as all three circle the mail. In De Quincey's associative logic, the revolutions of his periodic affair are connected with broader notions of mutability and change. Thunder and lightning in 1849, he remarks, "are not the thunder and lightning which I seem to remember about the time of Waterloo" (198). The pathetic fallacy quickly encompasses his lover as well, transforming Fanny into the representative of a historical transformation that lapses into sexual innuendo: "Roses, I fear, are degenerating, and, without a Red revolution, must come to the dust. The Fannies of our island . . . are not improving; and the Bath road is notoriously superannuated" (198). His attitude toward the affair is doubly nostalgic; his exclamation near the end of the episode—"Ah reader! when I look back upon those days, it seems to me that all things change or perish" (197)—laments the end of the love affair and the era. Fanny's story is about the loss of a beautiful woman and also the passing of both youth and a specific historical moment (which is in turn an episode in the history of the mail).

All of this suggests that the point of the story of Fanny of the Bath road is not that De Quincey falls in love with a woman he happens to meet on his route. Instead, given her place on his route, he is somehow required to fall in love with her. That the relationship lasts as long as it does is not the result of passion but repetition—the regularity and periodicity of the mail. The account of the affair plays out as if De Quincey is trying to imagine what social life would look like if it worked like the mail. Fanny's story, in other words, is a romance not merely because it concerns a love affair but because it imagines that networked systems actually have the kinds of transformative effects we routinely ascribe to them. De Quincey's fantasy is that, depicted in sufficient detail, the circumstances that compose the relationship could be made to give up their secrets and reveal the inaccessible principles of order that constitute interpersonal relationships, love affairs, and, ultimately, the social world itself. After Fanny, the essay turns from the beauti-

ful to the sublime, as the social world of the mail coach and the lovers' world within a world give way to "The Vision of Sudden Death" and the impressionistic, hallucinatory "Dream-Fugue, on the Above Theme of Sudden Death." This radical change in theme would appear to extinguish any hope of understanding social relations in the quotidian terms of social and romantic intercourse—thus it is all the more striking that the concluding sections of the essay do not so much replace as rewrite the story of Fanny of the Bath road. The essay ends with another failed love story, and while the relationship with Fanny is made possible by the mail-coach system, its sequel reveals the double-edged nature of the ruthless bureaucratic efficiency of social systems.

The second installment begins with an account of a journey from Manchester to Kendal during which the coachman falls asleep and De Quincey finds himself "left in charge of his Majesty's London and Glasgow mail" (220). De Quincey is sleeping, too, but wakes with a start to discover the "ominous accident of our situation": the runaway mail is "on the wrong side of the road," bearing down on a coach carrying two young lovers stopped on the road ahead (220). The mail coach clips the lovers' "little gig," and, in an excruciatingly dilated description which unfolds as if in slow motion, De Quincey reconstructs his brief glimpse of the aftermath of the accident as the mail speeds away (224).[31] The "frail and light" carriage is destroyed; the young man is immobilized by horror; the lady clutches the air, apparently in the throes of death (220). She "rose and sank upon her seat, sank and rose, threw up her arms wildly to heaven . . . , fainting, praying, raving, despairing!" (224). The system that serves, even creates, love on the Bath road destroys it on the road to Preston. The mail does not merely fail the lovers; it tears them apart. The lady's rising and sinking recall De Quincey's memories of Fanny of the Bath road, but here the sense of loss produced by looking back on past experience is distilled into an instant.[32] The accident collapses the temporality of De Quincey's nostalgia into a frozen moment, a tableau of death-in-life, and the dynamic movement of memory is arrested.

De Quincey did not purchase this opportunity of driving, but his account of mail-coach society makes it possible to see his taking of the reigns as less an accident than a part of "the whole mail-coach service." Set against the mail's "awful political mission" (184), the collision between his majesty's London and Glasgow mail and a private carriage discloses the cost of rapid transit; the young woman in the "reedy gig" is collateral damage of the transport revolution (221). The grand national system of which the mail forms a

part might explain the deaths of soldiers on the continent—their sacrifice for their country underwrites national unity—but it cannot so easily assimilate accidental casualties to civilians at home. Early in the essay, De Quincey remarks that "sometimes after breakfast his majesty's mail would become frisky" and, on its way through the morning market, "upset an apple-cart, a cart loaded with eggs, &c." He claims that he, "as far as was possible, endeavoured in such case to represent the conscience and moral sensibilities of the mail," but he must finally acknowledge the mail's amorality:

> Tied to post-office time, with an allowance in some cases of fifty minutes for eleven miles, could the royal mail pretend to undertake the offices of sympathy and condolence? Could it be expected to provide tears for the accidents of the road? If even it seemed to trample on humanity, it did so, I contended, in discharge of its own more peremptory duties.
>
> (191)

The duties of the mail and the demands of "post-office time" offer no more leisure to lament the death of the young woman than the breaking of eggs. Nor do they allow De Quincey to stand in for the morality of the mail. The mail is no respecter of persons.[33]

II.

To this point, I have focused on De Quincey's attempts to understand society as a system and have argued that the distinctive feature of his analysis is its commitment to an ever-finer-grained account of the effects of systems on social life. In "Style" and "Travelling in England in Old Days," publication and public transport are not only systems in themselves but come to serve as figures for picturing society as a system—or system of systems. "The English Mail-Coach" elaborates this analysis by inverting its angle of approach: rather than abstracting from individual instances of social systems, De Quincey's account of the mail supplements what is essentially an analogical style of argument (society as a whole operates according to the same laws as the postal system) with an inductive method that imagines that general social laws can be read out of everyday interactions and accidents. The essay's generic trajectory—from comedy to romance to tragedy—reflects a literary effort to comprehend the full range of social experience; the proximity of love and death, in the rewriting of the story of Fanny of the Bath Road in the fatal accident on the road to Preston, is at once the realization

and the failure of this claim to comprehensiveness. Love and death in "The English-Mail Coach" mark the boundaries of the self-regulating system.

De Quincey's most sustained analysis of the relationship between a formal system and its social and historical contexts appears in his writings on economics. De Quincey was at first a skeptic about political economy. In the *Confessions*, he comments that he found economic theory to be "generally the very dregs and rinsings of the human intellect" (65). David Ricardo's *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817) made him a convert; it did for De Quincey what Wordsworth's poetry would do for Mill. "For two years," he writes, "I believe that I read no book but one."[34] Ricardo inspired "wonder and curiosity," "emotions that had long been dead in me," rousing him from the personal and intellectual malaise brought on by opium.[35] In a passage that is as much an expression of his own ambition as a reflection on Ricardo's accomplishments, De Quincey marvels that "an Englishman, and he not in academic bowers, but oppressed by mercantile and senatorial cares," had "deduced, *à priori*, from the understanding itself, laws which first gave a ray of light into the unwieldy chaos of materials, and had constructed what had been but a collection of tentative discussions into a science of regular proportions, now first standing on an eternal basis."[36] Circumstances prevented him from publishing his first work on Ricardo (to be titled *A Prolegomena to All Future Systems of Political Economy*), but, after the *Confessions* made his reputation and secured him a position as a regular contributor to the *London Magazine*, he produced critiques of Malthus, a series of dialogues on Ricardo, an essay on Ricardo and Adam Smith, and, finally, for *Blackwood's*, the three essays—originally titled *Ricardo Made Easy; or, What Is the Radical Difference between Ricardo and Adam Smith? With Occasional Notices of Ricardo's Oversights*—that would become *The Logic of Political Economy* (1844).

While De Quincey notices Ricardo's oversights, he works tirelessly in *The Logic of Political Economy* to explicate the "scientific proportions" and "eternal basis" of Ricardo's thought. In the preface, he diagnoses the fundamental shortcomings of contemporary economic theory, claiming that, "as regards its *practical* applications," economic science is "as treacherous as Shakespeare's 'stairs of sand.'"[37] The image he conjures up to illustrate these unsound foundations—of "phantom arrays of fleeting columns and fluctuating edifices" created by winds on the Arabian desert (119)—recalls the description of Piranesi's drawings in the *Confessions*. If the impossible coherence of Piranesi's designs represented the "power of endless growth and self-reproduction,"

the image of economic theory as shifting Arabian sands figures the same power perceived from the opposite point of view.[38] Rather than Piranesi's impossible coherence—design undone by paradox—De Quincey finds in political economy a promise of coherence that is perpetually, and simultaneously, extended and withdrawn. Despite Ricardo's genius, "nothing can be postulated—nothing can be demonstrated; for anarchy, even as to the earliest principles, is predominant" (119). The sandcastles of political economy are "for ever collapsing into dust" (119). *The Logic of Political Economy* seeks to bring order to this chaos by shoring up "the distinctions which are elementary to the science" (118). Its focus is Ricardo's theory of value—which, De Quincey argues, commentators utterly misunderstood. The failure to appreciate Ricardo's revision of Smith, he claims, stunted the development of political economy as a systematic mode of thought.

But even as he works in the service of system, De Quincey encounters the very problem he claims the political economists had failed to address. However beautifully conceived in theory, in practice systems are inevitably colored by extrinsic conditions. The market is like men in Marx's conception of history: it does not make prices just as it pleases but "under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past."[39] Thus, the tendency of political economists to act as if the law of supply and demand operates in a vacuum, independent of preexisting circumstances, amounts to "metaphysical confusion":

> This is an error which has led to worse consequences than any of the others here noticed. People fancy that the relation of Supply and Demand could by possibility, and that in fact often *does*, determine separately *per se* the selling price of an article. Within a few months this monstrous idea has been assumed for true by Colonel Torrens, in an express work on Economic Politics; by Lord Brougham, in relation to the foreign corn trade; and by almost every journal in the land that has fallen under my own eye. But it is a metaphysical impossibility that Supply and Demand, the relation of which is briefly expressed by the term "market value," could ever affect price except by a *secondary* force.
>
> (121)

De Quincey's point seems straightforward enough: while the relation of supply and demand affects price, supply and demand necessarily act on preexisting values. Unlike natural price, which reflects the cost of production and "is always monomial," market price "must always be binomial" (121). It can-

not be determined merely by the relationship between supply and demand at a given moment but must be calculated in relation to "an antecedent price, arising from some other cause" (121). Because market price cannot be determined in isolation, however, De Quincey's own logic undermines the stability of his analysis. The "other cause" toward which he gestures must itself extend indefinitely into the past (121). It is also multiply determined—and similarly affected by supply and demand. Metaphysical impossibility, it seems, gives way to an epistemological dead end. On this account, the logic of political economy is constitutively recursive, and it is this logic, rather than its principles, that makes economics "the dismal science."[40]

As exhaustive (and exhausting) as it is, *The Logic of Political Economy* stops short of pursuing the implications of its analysis to their logical conclusion: system building requires a closed frame of reference. Two years later, however, in "System of the Heavens," De Quincey returns to the complications that emerge when systems are situated in space and time and offers a striking illustration of the limitations of the systematizing impulse. Published in *Tait's* in 1846, "System of the Heavens" is ostensibly a notice of the Scottish astronomer John Pringle Nichol's *Thoughts on Some Important Points Relating to the System of the World*. Rather than a formal review, however, De Quincey takes his friend's book as his "text"—about which his "little paper . . . may be said to hover."[41] *System of the World* was a work of popular science; in "System of the Heavens," De Quincey aims to inspire the reader with the sublimity of the universe revealed by recent advances in astronomy. His purpose is not to criticize or even summarize Nichol's account but, "through the light torrent *spray* of fanciful images or allusions," to give the reader "momentary glimpses of objects vast and awful" (8n1).

The essay opens with a question about the age of the earth posed by Kant in an article that De Quincey had translated for *Tait's* in 1833. In revisiting Kant's inquiry, De Quincey transforms it into a puzzle. He reasons that Kant's question could not have concerned the absolute age of the Earth, because knowing the Earth's age without a frame of reference would tell us nothing. Instead, he must have meant to ask, "What proportion does that amount form of the total career allotted to this planet?" (8). At issue, in other words, is not "the *positive* amount of years through which our Earth has existed" (8) but "the *period* of life, the *stage*, which she may be supposed to have reached" (9). In sketching out the implications of the question, the

essay develops a fanciful conceit in which the Earth is "a *lady* planet" and "our dear little mother" (8). Asking her age is "a delicate point"—the question is "improper"—but he speculates about it at length and in absurd detail (8). "Is she a child, in fact," De Quincey asks, "or is she an adult? And, *if* an adult, and that you gave a ball to the Solar System, is she that kind of person that you would introduce to a waltzing partner, some fiery young gentleman like Mars; or would you rather suggest to her the sort of partnership which takes place at a whist-table?" (9).

In his essay, Kant had warned against using "the sequence of human generations . . . as a measure for God's works at large."[42] But De Quincey's personification of the planets and the analogy he draws between planetary time and generational relationships aren't finally intended to measure the Earth's age in human years. Instead, the correlations between human generations and God's works underscore the idea that age, of the Earth or a human being, is not an absolute value but a relationship. De Quincey claims that Kant loses sight of this fact, and the oversight prompts him to wonder whether there is, "after all, any stationary meaning in the question?" (10). If we could persuade "our dear excellent mother the Earth" to tell us her age, "still *that* would leave us all as much in the dark as ever: since, if the answer were 'Why, children, at my next birth-day I shall count a matter of some million centuries,' we should still be at a loss to *value* her age: would it mean that she was a mere chicken, or that she was 'getting up in years' "? Conversely, if the Earth confessed only "generally to being a lady of a certain age," we would know "the *valuation* of the age" but not "the *absolute* years numerically: would a 'certain age' mean that 'mamma' was a million, or perhaps not much above seventy thousand?" (12). Each question in effect assumes the other; taken alone, neither answer tells us what we want to know. Like market value, any meaningful calculation of the age of the Earth "must always be binomial." Or, De Quincey puts it in "System of the Heavens," "there is apparently this two-edged embarrassment pressing upon the case" (11–12).

This insight, it turns out, is the central problem with Kant's inquiry, and it gets to the heart of De Quincey's essay. De Quincey variously proposes that the Earth is a child or an adult; a lady, "a healthy growing girl," or "a fine noble young woman"; or even "in the category of decaying, nay, of decayed women" (9–10). But however the Earth is figured, she is also a mother to man and a sister to the other planets in the solar system, and these intersecting

identifications "explode" Kant's problem. Surprisingly, the Earth's geological transformations suggest that she is perhaps "both young and old":

> Young? If she is not young at present, perhaps she *will* be so in the future. Old? If she is not old at this moment, perhaps she *has* been old, and has a fair chance of becoming so again. In fact, she is a Phoenix that is known to have secret processes for rebuilding herself out of her own ashes. Little doubt there is but she has seen many a birth-day, many a funeral night, and many a morning of resurrection. For listen:—Where now the mightiest of oceans rolls in pacific beauty, once were anchored continents and boundless forests.
>
> (10)

The ages of the Earth are "known to us geologically as facts" but remain "obscure as durations," and inquiring into the Earth's age invokes the collision of human and geological time. Planetary revolutions, like political revolutions, are not so much linear developments as cycles of "ruin and restoration" (11). Because cyclical time offers no fixed point of reference, the absolute age of the Earth and its relative value remain puzzlingly independent variables.

The effort to establish a stable frame of reference—to find a "stationary meaning"—prompts De Quincey to take up "the analogy of our whole planetary system" (which, he claims, Kant has "overlooked") (13). He reasons that, as siblings, any difference in age between the planets should be negligible and asks, how old do "we take our brother and sister planets to be? For *this* determination as to a point in *their* constitution will do something to illustrate our own" (12). For example, if Jupiter is, as Kant seemed to believe, a young planet—as De Quincey puts it, "the younger brother of our mamma"—how can the Earth be "an old decayed lady" (13)? Moreover, if the Earth were old, surely we, her children, would be old as well—a claim De Quincey refutes, citing "a thousand indications of strength and budding youth" in the nineteenth century, including the promise of "Lord Rosse's almost awful telescope" (14). While it might seem that De Quincey simply confuses planetary time and human time (men are young, so the Earth can't be old), his real point has to do with their coordination. That the Earth is at once our mother and Jupiter's sister reminds us that it is a part of *two* systems, one terrestrial and one celestial. Asking questions about the Earth's age invokes the system to which it belongs, and thinking about the solar system in turn

involves consideration of the systems of which it forms merely a small part. The resolving power of the new telescope not only reveals worlds beyond worlds; it discovers systems beyond, and within, systems.

In this way, Lord Rosse's telescope brings the paradoxes of system into focus. The problem with larger and larger telescopes, De Quincey observes, is that more power does not mean greater resolution. In fact, "concurrently with all increase in the space-penetrating power, there arises an increasing confusion in the images reflected. As the power of this instrument advances in one direction, correspondingly it recedes in another" (14–15). Initially, it appears that Lord Rosse's telescope has overcome this obstacle:

> Most truly we may say that he has revealed more by far than he found. The theatre to which he has introduced us is *immeasurably* beyond the old one which he found. To say that he found, in the visible universe, a little wooden theatre of Thespis, a *tréteau* or shed of vagrants, and that he presented us, at a price of incalculable anxiety, with a Roman colosseum—*that* is to say little. Columbus, when he introduced the Old World to the New, did in fact only introduce the majority to the minority; but Lord Rosse has introduced the minority to the majority.
>
> (15)

In making Rosse a greater explorer than Columbus, this passage ostensibly celebrates his accomplishment. But, even as he praises Rosse's discovery, De Quincey acknowledges that it comes "at a price." The sheer scale of the universe made visible by the new telescope breeds an "incalculable anxiety"—a mirror image of the universe's newly discovered immeasurability. The transposition of Old World and New, majority and minority, underscores De Quincey's concern with relative values. What is at stake is not size but scale, and the revaluation of these relationships carries with it the menacing possibility that this new universe might prove to be as hostile to man as the Age of Discovery was to the indigenous peoples of the Americas. What Lord Rosse has found is positive knowledge; what he has revealed, by comparison, is limitless, and this immeasurability marks the limits of our knowledge. The universe, to this way of thinking, is "a practicable object not reconcilable with the limitation of human power."[43]

The universe revealed by the new telescope puts us in touch with the sublime—but not, De Quincey suggests, because it expands the scope of our knowledge. Instead, it externalizes the power that lies within the human

mind.[44] "In reality, the depths and the heights which are in man, the depths by which he searches, the heights by which he aspires, are but projected and made objective externally in the three dimensions of space which are outside him." The astronomer's objective discoveries are merely the shadows of subjective power: "the mirror to a mightier abyss that will one day be expanded in himself" (15). De Quincey's stunning description of the nebula of Orion imagines this sublime abyss as "a head thrown back, and raising its face (or eyes, if eyes it had) in the very anguish of hatred to some unknown heavens" (19). The image of the nebula expresses "brutalities unspeakable" (19) and "a convolute of cruelty and revenge" (20). In linking this allegorical visage to Milton's allegory of sin and death, De Quincey makes the stars continuous with literature and religion in their ability to provoke pity and fear. In resolving them into a superhuman shape, he retains human form as his point of reference—a practice that connects him to the first watchers of the skies, who saw stars and created constellations.

David Masson commented in his edition of De Quincey on the "weird and fantastic effect" of the description of the Orion Nebula; Grevel Lindop calls it "a bizarre prose poem."[45] Part of the strangeness of the passage is that Rosse's telescope actually contributes very little to its effect; as scholars have noted, while the image of the nebula De Quincey describes appeared in Nichol's book, it was created by John Hershel rather than Rosse.[46] Before Rosse, De Quincey claims, the nebula was famous for its resistance to "the most potent of telescopes" (17). After Rosse, it is known for its "submission . . . to the all-conquering telescope" (18). Whether the nebula resists or submits is, in a sense, irrelevant, because its significance has to do with its status as a mirror to the observer's mind. In a note to the revised version of the essay published in 1854, De Quincey answers those who criticized his depiction of the nebula by insisting on the fundamentally subjective nature of description: "All such appearances, whether seen in fire, or in the clouds, or in the arbitrary combinations of the stars, are read differently by different people" (19n2). These differences sometimes result from different conditions —the appearance of the nebula is affected by its motion and the motion of the Earth; it changes when the power of the telescope is adjusted—but De Quincey insists that "even where the grouping is exactly the same, being so rigorously limited as to exclude all action of caprice, the result may yet be very different" (19n2). Like Wordsworth's descriptions of the appearance of

clouds or storms, the purpose of De Quincey's description is not accurate representation. Instead, the nebula is a vehicle for the realization of an image of his subjective reflection.

If De Quincey seems to go too far in asserting the fundamentally subjective nature of perception, it would be a mistake to allow his weak relativism to obscure his strong commitment to the significance of depths and heights. Spatial references are of course crucial to the discourse of the sublime, but not merely because they reflect its character as Longinus or Burke described it. They also highlight the situation and orientation of the perceiver. It is crucial to De Quincey's account, for example, that Lord Rosse and Wordsworth both look upward. In a long, seemingly bizarre footnote, he remarks that "if on a public road you meet a party of four women, it is at least fifty to one that they are all laughing; whereas if you meet a party of [men], you may wager safely that they are talking gravely, and that one of them is uttering the word *money*" (32). He concludes that,

> because our sisters are too much occupied with the playful things of this earth, and our brothers with its gravities . . . neither party sufficiently watches the skies. And *that* accounts for a fact which often has struck myself—viz. that, in cities, on bright moonless nights, when some brilliant skirmishings of the Aurora are exhibiting, or even a luminous arch, which is a broad riband of snowy light that spans the skies, positively, unless I myself say to people "Eyes upwards!" not one in a hundred, male or female, but fails to see the show, though it may be seen *gratis*, simply because their eyes are too uniformly reading the earth.
>
> (32)

On the one hand, the point of this passage is that worldly preoccupations—women's with trivialities, men's with "*money*"—prevent us from looking outside ourselves and beyond our world. Lord Rosse and Wordsworth, their gazes turned upward, stand opposed to this general "downward direction of the eyes" (32).

On the other hand, however, De Quincey's "Eyes upwards!" marks his interest in what Kant called orientation in thinking. In "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" Kant grounds our experience of the objective world in our subjective sense of direction. He emphasizes the importance of correlating external objects (like "the sun in the sky") with the "feeling" of an internal difference in the subject (between, for example, one's left and right hands).[47]

Without this "*subjective* distinction," he claims, "objective data" alone would be insufficient:

> If all the constellations, while in other respects retaining the same shape and the same position in relation to each another, were one day miraculously transposed so that their former easterly direction now became west, no human eye would notice the slightest change on the next clear night, and even the astronomer, if he heeded only what he saw and not at the same time what he felt, would inevitably become *disorientated*. But in fact, the ability to make distinctions by means of the feeling of right and left comes quite naturally to his aid—an ability which, though implanted by nature, has become a habit as a result of frequent practice; and if he simply directs his eyes to the Pole Star, he will not only notice the change which has occurred, but will still be able to *orientate* himself.
>
> (239)

Kant "extend[s] this geographical process of the concept of orientation to signify any kind of orientation within a given space" and offers a thought experiment to illustrate it: "In the darkness, I can orientate myself in a familiar room so long as I can touch any one object whose position I remember" (239). Were the positions of objects in the room shifted, however, "for a joke," "in such a way that their relative positions remained the same but what was previously on the right was now on the left, I would be quite unable to find my way about" (239).

In "System of the Heavens," De Quincey argues that we inhabit a universe in which the transpositions Kant imagines are our perpetual condition.[48] The motions of the Earth, the other planets, the stars, and the systems to which they belong leave us always in the dark, depriving us of a stable frame of reference. For left and right, De Quincey substitutes up and down, depth and height, space and time. In his reading of the nebula of Orion, for example, he instructs the reader to turn Nichol's picture upside down, "for it happens that in the professor's book it is placed upside down as regards the natural position of the human head" (19). This shift in orientation mocks Kant's careful reasoning—as De Quincey playfully acknowledges when he remarks, "Were it not treasonable to insinuate the possibility of an error against so great a swell as Immanuel Kant, one would be inclined to fancy that Mr. Kant had really been dozing a little on this occasion" (11). But his serious aim throughout "System of the Heavens" is to demonstrate the disorienting effects of the realization that the universe affords no fixed spot in

relation to which we might orient ourselves. In a universe in flux, human heads, unlike Kant's hands, have no "natural position."

"Great is the mystery of Space," De Quincey writes, "greater is the mystery of Time" (15). Nebular astronomy after William Herschel demonstrates the continuity between these propositions and thus illustrates the full scope of the telescope's power to perplex. At the end of the eighteenth century, Herschel's improved telescopes, which brought nebulae like Orion's closer, seemed to promise that these "milky spots" would eventually all be resolved into myriad, discrete "starry worlds" (21). (This is, in fact, what Lord Rosse claimed—mistakenly it turned out—to have discerned in the nebula of Orion.) The relative distinctness or diffusion of these spots, it was assumed, was a function of their distance from the observer. "But," De Quincey observes, "*that* did not follow: for, in the treasury of nature, it turned out that there were other resources for modifying the powers of distance, for muffling and unmuffling the voice of stars" (22). A world "at the distance *x*," pushed back to "a double distance," should become less distinct (22). Instead, "by compression, by deeper centralization," it becomes brighter (22). Push it back a second time, and it grows faint; but repeat the operation, moving the starry bodies to four times their original distance, and "once again it shall shake off the oppression of distance" and grow brighter (22). And this, De Quincey emphasizes, is merely one of several "cases of perplexity" in sidereal astronomy. The astronomer finds that size and distance are indistinguishable ("—is the size less or the distance greater?"), the motions of the universe and of the earth within it are "doubtfully confounded," and the relative positions of two distant stars are impossible to determine (is proximity real "or simply an apparent proximity from lying in the same visual line, though in far other depths of space?") (24). In revealing the vastness of space and exponentially expanding its sublime distances, the telescope confounds the observer's ability to find anything in it—or, more precisely, to speak with any degree of certainty about what he has found.

In "creat[ing] immeasurable worlds," Lord Rosse has discovered innumerable occasions for confusion (23). Distance, magnitude, and motion are not positive values but relationships, and thus sources of equivocation. The double stars that, along with the nebular hypothesis, claimed the attention of astronomers from Kant and Herschel to Rosse and Nichol, are "equivocal phenomena—phenomena that are reconcilable indifferently with either of two assumptions" (26). De Quincey argues that depth, height, and the vast

distances of space are not cognizable by infants, animals, or brutes: "Man only has a natural function for expanding, on an illimitable sensorium, the illimitable growths of space. . . . To man is as much reserved the prerogative of perceiving space in its higher extensions as of geometrically constructing the relations of space. And the brute is no more capable of apprehending abysses through the eye than he can build upwards or analyze downwards the aerial synthesis of Geometry" (16). "System of the Heavens" is an attempt to make sense of the expanded, and expanding, universe revealed by the telescope through such "aerial synthesis." The attempt fails, but De Quincey's analysis suggests that the failure is necessary—and this is precisely his point. Like Memnon's head, which De Quincey encountered soon after it arrived at the British Museum in 1821, space "baffles and confounds all faculty of computation" (17).[49] Attempts to calculate interstellar distances yield results that mystify rather than enlighten: traveling at a speed three times that of the earth in orbit, it would take forty-one thousand years to reach a star in the constellation Cygnus; at the same rate, reaching "that distance to which Lord Rosse's six-feet mirror has so recently extended our *vision*" would take two hundred and fifty million years. Calculating the ratio of these distances "is a simple rule-of-three problem for a child" (26), but the problem is not the difficulty of the computation. Rather, it is that the result combines human time (measured in *years*) and geological time (measured in *thousands* or *millions* of years). The disparity between these time scales is such that the ratio of forty-one thousand to two hundred and fifty million is meaningless from the point of view of human reason.[50] Lord Rosse's telescope has transformed men into brutes. Faced with the overwhelming scale of the universe, man joins the "deer, or hares, or foxes, and the pack of hounds in pursuit, chaser and chased, all going headlong over a precipice together" (16).

De Quincey's reflections on sidereal time strangely anticipate an obvious criticism of the literary-theoretical conception of "deep time" articulated by Wai Chee Dimock. In "Deep Time: American Literature and World History" and *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time*, Dimock criticizes the geographical and temporal limitations of studying American literature in the restricted context of the United States, arguing that the dramatic expansion of the space-time of literary history has the power to alter "our very sense of the connectedness among human beings."[51] As Mark McGurl has pointed out in surveying objections to Dimock's argument, her injunction to "think big" raises pressing questions about "what principle of

limitation will be called upon to give that vaunting largeness and longness a meaningful form."[52] If we turn from "deep time" imagined in terms of Braudel's *longue durée* to its "original geological meaning," in which hundreds or thousands of years give way to millions or thousands of millions of years, the relevance that Dimock finds, for example, in connections that link Emerson and Hafez, recedes from view as the relevance of human time is eclipsed by "the deep time of the earth sciences."[53] Sidereal time serves the same purpose for De Quincey, dwarfing not only human accomplishments but also human understanding. In opening a window onto the universe, Lord Rosse's telescope would seem to have closed the door on human aspiration.

De Quincey's word-painting of the Orion nebula does not resolve this seemingly intractable problem. Quite the opposite, it dramatizes the human incapacity not to resolve the incomprehensibly distant and vast into human terms: the nebula becomes a face. Out of the failure of human comprehension De Quincey creates an experience of the sublime—the original means of access to what McGurl calls "the posthuman comedy." McGurl is interested in "those rare works of literature that set themselves the task of scaling our vision dramatically up or down or both, blasting through ordinary perception to the most surprising vistas we can imagine."[54] In readings of H. P. Lovecraft and the "workshop story," he sketches out what it might mean for literature to venture beyond Kant's conception of the two stages of the sublime—"*first* the failure of the sense in the face of the very large, *then* the triumph of reason in the concept of infinity"—"into a third stage, unable now to shake the knowledge that reason, too, is sure to be engulfed in a larger darkness."[55] In "System of the Heavens," De Quincey ventures into this third stage. When he asks the reader to turn the image of the Orion Nebula upside-down, this knowledge is performed as a kind of parody of Kant's argument about orientation in thinking. For all of the obvious sublimity of his characteristically apocalyptic conclusions (the last section of "The English Mail-Coach" is perhaps the best of many examples), moreover, there is something predictable and programmatic about these sublime apotheoses—a sense in which their very familiarity (and reproducibility) carries with it the knowledge that reason cannot have the last word.

This is the point of "System of the Heavens," and the point of looking up into the sky. The mysteries De Quincey addresses are worth his attention precisely because they defy his understanding; in their defiance and cold contempt (reflected in "the detestable phantom" of the Orion nebula), they

inspire him to hold "up a mirror of description to appearances so grand, and in a dim sense often so symbolic" (19n2). Near the end of the essay, De Quincey imagines "a man in the last century, and an eminent man too," who rejected the sublimity of astronomy: "On the contrary, he regarded the solar system as decidedly vulgar; because the planets were so infernally punctual . . . that they forced him . . . to think of post-office clocks, mail-coaches, and book-keepers. Regularity may be beautiful, but it excludes the sublime" (29).[56] This complaint, he argues, was the result of living "in the days of mere planetary astronomy" (30). It is answered, and more than answered, by the discoveries that have transformed "our own little system" into "a subordinate province" (30). "We ought no longer to talk of astronomy, but of *the astronomies*" (30). With the multiplication of astronomical systems ("1, the planetary, 2, the cometary, 3, the sidereal; . . . 4, the nebular"), the sublimity of the heavens is restored or revealed anew; systems of such amazing size and complexity necessarily produce "variety," "irregularity," and "anomalies" (30–31). Contemplation of, or confrontations with, such anomalies, De Quincey maintains, renew and sustain our sense of the sublime—not in the second, mastering phase of Kant's two-stage model but in a third stage that is a darker, self-cancelling version of the human failure to comprehend the very large. Its negative difference is that it includes the consciousness of our own undoing—rendered, perversely, as the ultimate form of self-knowledge.

I have argued that "The English Mail-Coach" is De Quincey's attempt to bring this self-knowledge down to earth. In the wake of "System of the Heavens," though, it is striking that he begins his essay on the mail by situating it in the context of the cosmos. In comparing the invention of the mail coach to Galileo's discovery Jupiter's moons, De Quincey remarks that Mr. Palmer has accomplished a thing "very hard to do on out little planet, the Earth, however cheap [it] may be held by eccentric people in comets" (183). In "System of the Heavens," cometary astronomy assumes a special place among "the astronomies" because it offers a means of overcoming the inaccessibility of the everyday circumstances of our existence. De Quincey argues that "in going round the sun, we must be continually passing over old roads, and yet have no means of establishing an acquaintance with them: they might as well be new for every trip" (31). Because we cannot occupy a still point from which to observe them, "those chambers of ether, through which we are tearing along night and day (for *our* train stops at no stations)" are invisible (31). To see them would require a mark, a point in relation to which we might

orient ourselves, and, "for want of such a mark, though all our lives flying past them and through them, we can never challenge them as old acquaintances" (31). Traveling along our unmarked orbit, like trekking in the desert ("one monotonous iteration of sand, sand, sand"), "amounts to traveling through an abstract idea." Comets, De Quincey suggests, mark the celestial road in such a way as to render them "liable to recognition, and distinguishable from the rest" (31).

Mail coaches are like comets; they are marks that make it possible to read the everyday events that would otherwise remain invisible. The shift in scale that takes us from the solar system to mail-coach society—the implicit claim that a truly organic system unites the local, the global, and even the universal and that moving from macro to micro and back requires only a shift of point of view—makes the mail into a miniature of the larger systems with which it is ostensibly continuous. This aspiration at once conforms to Clifford Siskin's definition of the Enlightenment as "that specific mode of producing knowledge in writing—systems within SYSTEM" and exemplifies how such attempts to write systems "tended to sink under their own weight."[57] We might understand De Quincey's systems—economic and astronomical, but also the mail or the mind and personal identity as they are constituted by memory in the *Confessions* and *Suspiria de Profundis*—along these same lines. His digressions are not the product of a disorganized mind but of a rigorous commitment to following his inquiries to their logical conclusions, wherever they lead and however irrational the pursuit might seem. That these investigations end in sublime conflagrations is the effect of the inevitable failure of De Quincey's late Enlightenment project.

This sense of De Quincey is not new. J. Hillis Miller identified the pattern more than fifty years ago in his account of De Quincey's desire "to create, in language, a human equivalent of God's mode of existence."[58] Miller regarded this aim as the key to De Quincey's style—the sense in which his essays, and even his sentences, express the conviction that "everything *is* related to everything else, but in random and fortuitous ways."[59] He argues that De Quincey's pursuit of order "is ultimately a failure . . . not so much because the point of consciousness cannot expand to fill the immensity of space and time, as because the unexpanded point can never be described or filled up, or traversed from side to side. . . . Every subject, however small, is inexhaustible."[60] Every attempt at precise description, every effort of understanding, leads not to clarity but to an encounter with the infinite. In a

paradigmatic passage on Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the Tortoise from a late essay on Sir William Hamilton (written for *Hogg's Instructor* in 1852), De Quincey attributes this effect to the "antinomy" of "downright certainty . . . matched against . . . downright impossibility."[61] It is the conflict between practical knowledge ("Achilles will pass. My friend, we know he will.") and what appears to be a metaphysical law ("this principle so peremptorily denying the possibility of such a fact") that "constitutes our perplexity, or, to use a Grecian word still more expressive, which constitutes our *aporia*, that is, our resourcelessness."[62] Miller's insight is to recognize this resourcelessness as the storehouse of De Quincey's art. De Quincey does not fail because he loses his way; he fails "because, however straight he goes, he can never exhaust the infinite which lurks in the finite. Each subject must be 'followed into endless mazes.'"[63] His digressions and his wandering are motivated by a drive for lucidity and comprehensiveness so strong that it frustrates its own ends. The pursuit of order leads, inevitably, to disorder.

The final twist, though, is that for De Quincey the failures that undo systems are themselves productive—of sublimity and, in keeping with Kant's larger claim about the sublime, of thought. Systems are fictions, but they are necessary—or at least unavoidable. And they necessarily fail. If their creation reflects a conviction that the mind, world, and universe are governed by reason, their failure is a testament to both the limitations of our reason and the persistent desire to make sense of the mysteries and accidents we encounter, especially those that defy our comprehension.

Coda

The Strange System of Human Society

> The real, geographic and terrestrial space in which we find ourselves confronts us with creatures that are interwoven with one another, in an order which, in relation to the great network of taxonomies, is nothing more than chance, disorder, or turbulence.
>
> —Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

In "System of the Heavens," Thomas De Quincey directs his gaze upward to the cosmos and finds in the Orion Nebula the monstrous reflection of a human face. The connections drawn in the previous chapter between this late essay and De Quincey's earlier explorations of individual identity and the social world retrace the trajectory of this book's examination of the desire to comprehend the social order. The arc of the project has moved from the individual and the limits of sympathetic identification (Johnson and Sterne) through various registers of social experience (Smollett, Godwin, and Austen) to the prospect of discovering order in the social world ("The English Mail-Coach" and *The Logic of Political Economy*) or the worlds that lie beyond ("System of the Heavens"). In a sense, in turning his attention to the heavens, De Quincey returns to the impulse that motivated the Enlightenment drive for order—the desire to apply principles derived from the natural sciences to the social world. That this turn reveals not natural order but, by way of the nebula's strange resemblance to Milton's sin and death, human design emblematizes the futility of the quest. For De Quincey, this limitation is a philosophical insight and a fundamental fact about human cognition; it reflects the essentially self-reflexive nature of thought itself. As he

puts it in "System of the Heavens," "The depths and the heights which are in man, the depths by which he searches, the heights by which he aspires, are but projected and made objective externally in the three dimensions of space which are outside him."[1]

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault offers a different account of the mind's confrontation with the external world. Rather than a projection or reflection of what lies within the mind, as De Quincey would have it, Foucault argues that Enlightenment natural history was predicated on the continuity of nature and that "any effort to establish an order in nature and to discover general categories within it" depends upon the conviction that the world that lies outside the mind is complete.[2] These "creatures that are interwoven with one another," constituted by "chance, disorder, or turbulence," are evidence not of the accidental composition of the natural world but of the imperfect and fragmentary nature of our experience of it.[3] Natural history, on Foucault's account, worked to overcome the limitations of experience and the apparent disorder of nature—what the eighteenth-century French botanist Michel Adanson called the "confused mingling of beings that seem to have been brought together by chance"—by positing "the continuous network of beings."[4] The pages that remain will suggest that, in *Frankenstein* (1818), Mary Shelley troubles this scientific presumption in a way that corresponds with the story about order and disorder that I have told in this book. Victor Frankenstein's quest for "the principle of life" and his conviction that life and death are merely "ideal bounds" that science is capable of "break[ing] through" propose that life itself is reducible to system; in a pattern that is by now familiar, however, his victory over the limitations of mortality brings about a series of catastrophic reversals.[5] Shelley's novel recounts perhaps the most spectacular failure in modern literature—and it does so by transforming what Sterne called "the progress of sociality" into a bleak diagnosis of the sociopathy at the heart of social relations.[6]

Victor Frankenstein sets out to create "a human being" (32). Instead, he produces a monster. While this bare summary distills *Frankenstein*'s plot, what it gets across most clearly is how completely the novel's interest depends on Shelley's elaboration of her narrative materials. In her 1831 introduction to the third edition of the novel, Shelley famously recounted the story's genesis, beginning with the scene of creation that occupied twentieth-century

film adaptations of the novel, from James Whale's 1931 *Frankenstein* ("It's alive!") to Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (1974). She describes her "mental vision" of "the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together," followed by "the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion." "Horror-stricken" by his success, she continues, the creator abandons his creature, hopeful that "this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter," only to be awakened by the "horrid thing" standing at his bedside, "looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes" (172).

The power of the story's primal scene is a function of a shared vision. The creature gazes on his creator; the creator awakens to the sight of his creature's "speculative eyes." Shelley sees what Frankenstein sees; what terrified him terrifies her, and she realizes, "What terrified me will terrify others" (172). This transmission of feeling, moreover, foreshadows the novel's nested narrative structure—an architecture built out of storytelling and sympathetic identification. But Shelley's introduction also suggests that the kernel of the story and the words that begin the transcription of her nightmare, "*It was on a dreary night of November*" (172), stand in need of a before and an after. "Every thing must have a beginning, to speak in a Sanchean phrase," Shelley writes, "and that beginning must be linked to something that went before." Victor Frankenstein needs a backstory. "Natural science is the genius that . . . [regulates his] fate" (21); his scientific studies are shaped by his childhood fascination with the "exploded systems, and useless names" of the medieval alchemists (23); and his desire to "bestow animation upon lifeless matter" and ultimately "renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption" is motivated by his mother's death from scarlet fever (32). More than merely acknowledging that her protagonist must have a history, however, Shelley's introduction also articulates a theory of composition that sounds strikingly like Frankenstein's creative process: "Invention, it must be humbly admitted, does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos; the materials must, in the first place, be afforded; it can give form to dark, shapeless substances, but cannot bring into being the substance itself" (171).

Like Shelley's novel, Frankenstein's creature is made up of parts. Famously assembled out of materials scavenged from "vaults and charnel houses" (30),

the method of his composition is underscored by Frankenstein's revulsion at the sight of his newly animated creature:

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips.
>
> (34)

For many critics, the creature's piecemeal construction represents a key to both his monstrosity and his symbolic significance. Franco Moretti, for example, observes that, "like the proletariat, he is a *collective* and *artificial* creature. He is not found in nature, but built."[7] Commenting on the same passage, Frances Ferguson argues that the importance of "Victor's perception of the monster as beautiful parts and hideous whole is that it recapitulates his view of society more generally and the novel's depiction of domesticity."[8] Zoe Beenstock has read "the monster's constitution from various bodies" as Shelley's commentary on the dilemmas of social contract theory, and Daniel Stout has offered the creature as a particularly vivid illustration of the problem that "the correlation of individual persons with particular actions" poses for modern liberal society.[9]

These readings share a sense that the creature is a kind of collective being; as an assemblage, he comes to stand for a social class, a concept of society, or a social problem. What I take from them, however, is not the idea that the creature represents collective being but that his existence is a reflection on social life. Shelley conceives of the creature as replicable rather than multiple. In striving to "pour a torrent of light into our dark world," Victor imagines himself as the author of "a new species [that] would bless [him] as its creator and source" and envisions a utopian society of artificial beings: "Many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (32).[10] This picture of a happy race of creatures is predicated not merely on the gratitude they will owe to the creator who is more than father (or mother) to them but on his absolute authority over them. As a project and a collec-

tion of parts, the creature exists only in his creator's imagination; given life, he becomes a separate being and assumes an independent existence. As Victor observes after fleeing from the newly animated creature, "I had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then; but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (35). Bringing the creature to life is a "catastrophe" because in realizing his desire Victor loses power over his creation. When he belatedly recognizes that his ambition has been a perversion of nature and that his creation is an abomination, he still has the chance to undo his mistake by killing the creature; that he does not but instead runs away is a powerful acknowledgment of his loss of control.

Frankenstein loses control, but the creature does not acquire it. The tragedy of his story is that the happy social life his creator has pictured for him is what he most wants but cannot have. He is absolutely denied the social existence for which he was created and instead learns about it from a position of deprivation. Living in his hovel alongside the De Lacey family's cottage, he observes their daily life; it is through their love and care for one another that he comes to understand the virtues of "social life" (85). Listening in on Felix De Lacey's instruction of his lover, Safie, he learns to read and to speak, absorbs "the science of letters, as it was taught to the stranger" (79), and audits lectures on human history and the organization of society. "Every conversation of the cottagers now opened new wonders to me," the creature says. "While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed upon the Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty, of rank, descent, and noble blood" (80). From the creature's perspective, the system of society is doubly strange: it is structured by divisions and exclusions (including the political corruption and cultural prejudice that have shaped the De Laceys' history), and it is defined in a way that excludes him altogether. Felix's lessons about social organization teach the creature about his own alienation. He lacks the "possessions most esteemed by" men; without lineage or wealth, he is destined to live "as a vagabond or a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profits of the chosen few!" (80). He labors for the benefit of the De Lacey family—leaving them firewood that they readily accept (despite not knowing their benefactor)—but, with no connection to them, he is in effect a kind of voluntary slave. At this point, the creature is still "absolutely ignorant" of his "creation and creator" (80). What he does

know is that he lacks the attributes of social life: "no money, no friends, no kind of property" (80). His exclusion from society is as much the cause as the effect of his monstrosity.

After he has been driven away from the De Laceys' cottage, the creature finds himself not merely alone but "unsympathized with" (92): "For the first time the feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom" (93). His first victim is Victor's youngest brother, William, and he frames the family's servant Justine Mortiz for the crime, but, when he meets Frankenstein on the summit of Montanvert, he argues that he is "malicious because [he is] miserable" and that he has become a murderer only because he has been denied sympathy and benevolence (98). "Every where I see bliss," the creature declares, "from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend" (66). The creature's misery not only motivates his murderous behavior, it gives it a shape. He declares "everlasting war" against mankind, but the form his revenge takes is the mirror image of his deprivation; it is designed to put Frankenstein in touch with his social connections.[11] For his part, Victor seems to be in need of this grim reminder. Even after he begins to consider the effects of his actions, he remains strangely blind to what it means to have created a being who has never known sympathy and has no connections. While he remembers the creature's parting words—"I shall be with you on your wedding-night" (116)—it never occurs to him that the life the creature threatens is not his own. In murdering Frankenstein's bride and killing or causing the deaths of his family and friends, the creature visits on his creator the desolation that has been his only birthright.

We have tended to see in *Frankenstein* the triumph of disorder over order. Victor Frankenstein breaks the barrier between life and death and other boundaries fall in its wake; Enlightenment reason and modern science are unsettled by irrational desire and gothic designs. One of the novel's central ironies is that it is Frankenstein's effort to overcome the kind of accident that led to his mother's death that unleashes this chaos. By contrast, what I have tried to suggest in this coda is that there is another sense in which the disorder the novel depicts is bound very closely to the principles of social order that it explores. The revenge that the creature takes on his creator does not destroy boundaries so much as police them. The creature says that he wants "to tear up the trees, spread havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed the ruin" (92), but his destructiveness is focused and efficient. His antipathy toward his creator produces a string of

dead bodies that trace quite precisely the contours of Frankenstein's social world. If Frankenstein strives to master "the principle of life" in order to overcome the accidents of mortal existence, perhaps the final irony of the novel is that his creature's revenge is a reminder that it is the accidents that bind us to other people that constitute our worlds.

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NOTES

Introduction

1. Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1998), 325.

2. Borges, "On Exactitude," 325.

3. Lewis Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (London: Macmillan, 1893), 169.

4. Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot*, trans. Richard N. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 94. The preceding passage from *Elements of Philosophy* is quoted in Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 3.

5. D'Alembert, *Preliminary Discourse*, 95.

6. Denis Diderot, "Encyclopedia," in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project*, trans. Philip Stewart (Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, University of Michigan Library, 2002), http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0000.004, originally published as "Encyclopédie," in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1755), 5: 635A–648A.

7. Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, vii.

8. Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, vii.

9. Clifford Siskin, *SYSTEM: The Shaping of Modern Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 7. See also the essays collected in Clifford Siskin and William Warner, eds., *This Is Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Christian Thorne, *The Dialectic of Counter-Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jo Guldi, *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

10. Siskin, *SYSTEM*, 3–4.

11. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. J. Paul Hunter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 147. On Defoe and Swift, see Pat Rogers, "Gulliver and the Engineers," *Modern Language Review* 70:2 (1975): 260–70; John Mullan, "Swift, Defoe, and Narrative Forms," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature 1650–1740*, ed. Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 250–75; and Christine MacLeod, *Heroes of Invention: Technology, Liberalism and British Identity 1750–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35–37. On projects and projectors in the long eighteenth century more broadly, see the essays collected in Maximillian E. Novak, ed., *The Age of Projects* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

12. Luisa Calè and Adriana Craciun advance a related claim about the generativity of disorder in Enlightenment thought as the rationale for their 2011 special issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies*. "The Enlightenment may well be the age of the encyclopedia, the system, and the museum," Calè and Craciun argue, "but as conjectural forms of 'imperfect knowledge,' not as we know them today. Disorder lurks at the heart of these forms, sites, and practices" ("The Disorder of Things," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45:1 [2011]: 3; the quotation is from Johnson's definition of "conjecture"). In addition to Calè and Craciun's introduction, see, in the same issue, Jonathan Lamb, "Imagination, Conjecture, and Disorder," 53–69.

13. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

14. Despite a similar itinerary of texts, this book differs sharply from Eric Rothstein's *Systems of Order and Inquiry in Later Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). In his readings of *Rasselas*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Humphry Clinker*, *Amelia*, and *Caleb Williams*, Rothstein argues that each text demonstrates the inadequacy of a priori systems as a means of interpreting experience and depicts their replacement by empirical scientific methods. The process he describes thus reproduces Cassirer's account of the Enlightenment transition from the "spirit of systems" to a "systematic spirit" and finds, in late eighteenth-century fiction, the reflection of Enlightenment philosophy. By contrast, my argument has to do with the breakdown of the systematic spirit itself—and, more importantly, how Johnson, Sterne, Smollett, Godwin, Austen, and De Quincey employ its failures as starting points for their inquiries into the composition of the transformed social world of the long eighteenth century. My point about the literary representation of systems failure is not just that writers recognize that the drive to systematize inevitably undercuts itself, but that, in thinking about systems failure and imagining its consequences, they come to understand it as a fertile source of narrative invention.

15. Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Gardner D. Stout Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 171.

16. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (London: Penguin, 1997), 2.1.73. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

17. In "Sterne, Siebald, and Siege Architecture," Jonathan Lamb argues that "the failure of language adequately to express what has happened or what it is like to experience an incomprehensible event" is a generic feature of descriptions of scenes of trauma like the one Toby is attempting to narrate (*Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 19:1–2 [2006–7]: 21).

18. Anders Engberg-Pedersen has recently argued that "Toby's confusion stems not from the fact that the attacking armies have been cut off from seeing each other's operations, but from the fact that the siege works are transformed into a linguistic obstacle course" ("The Refraction of Geometry: *Tristram Shandy* and the Poetics of War, 1700–1800," *Representations* 123:1 [2013]: 30). But Toby's problem has less to do with the opacity of his

language than its capacity for self-reference. Language fails not because it ceases to refer to reality but because it refers all too well; words that describe obstacles become instantiations of the obstacles they describe. Toby is not, as Engberg-Pedersen claims, "literally stuck in language" (30–31). He is stuck in figurative language. This relationship between language's referential and figurative functions is an example of what Jonathan Lamb calls "the double principle" in Sterne (*Sterne's Fiction and the Double Principle* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989]).

19. I am indebted here to Engberg-Pedersen's account of *Tristram Shandy*'s "media investigation," in particular his observation that the novel's "examination of the discourse on war" "begins with one medium and then moves to the next, from language to maps to models" ("Refraction of Geometry," 30).

20. In Alex Solomon's concise formulation, "Tristram's commentary is not on the content of Toby's study per se, but on the impossibility of its fulfillment" ("The Novel and the Bowling Green: Toby Shandy's Diagrammatic Realism," *Philological Quarterly* 95:2 [2016]: 273).

21. Engberg-Pedersen's claim that Toby mistakes "a parabola for a hyperbola, and so on" is not quite right ("Refraction of Geometry," 32). Rather, Tristram's account suggests that Toby learns, first, from his reading of Tartaglia, that the path of a projectile is crooked rather than straight; second, from Galileo, that the path of a bullet projected horizontally is a parabola; and, third, from Newton (unnamed in the passage), that the projectile's path is more nearly a hyperbola than a parabola. For an account of the stages of Toby's study, see Melvyn New with Richard A. Davies and W. G. Day, eds., *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy: The Notes*, vol. 3 of *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1984), 137–38. Sterne's source (as Engberg-Pedersen and the editors of the *Florida Edition* note) was Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia: or, an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences*, 2 vols. (London, 1741, 1743). For another recent study of *Tristram Shandy* and ballistics, see Ala Alryyes, "Uncle Toby and the Bullet's Story in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*," *ELH* 82:4 (2015): 1109–34.

22. Nassim Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 2010), 178. Taleb gives an account of Berry's 1978 paper, "Regular and Irregular Motion," which originally appeared in *Topics in Nonlinear Mechanics*, ed. S. Jorna, *American Institute of Physics Proceedings* 46 (1978): 16–120.

23. For influential studies of probability in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and Douglas Lane Patey, *Probability and Literary Form: Philosophic Theory and Literary Practice in the Augustan Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

24. Joseph de Maistre, *Considerations on France* (1796), in *The Works of Joseph de Maistre*, ed. and trans. Jack Lively (New York: Schocken, 1971), 47, quoted in Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), x.

25. Toby's term is "ichnography" (2.5.86), which is drawn from Vitruvius's *De architectura*.

26. Toby and Trim fought in the Nine Years' War (1688–1697); the siege of Namur took place in 1695. The sieges they reenact were from the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1715), and the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) ended Britain's involvement in the conflict.

27. Tom McCarthy, *Remainder* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 3.

28. *Synecdoche, New York*, dir. Charlie Kaufman (Sony Pictures Classics, 2008).

29. Tristram describes the end of Toby's work on the bowling green in a way that emphasizes its violence: "There is an indignant way in which a man sometimes dismounts his horse, which is as good as to say to him, 'I'll go afoot, Sir, all the days of my life, before I would ride a single mile upon your back again.' Now my uncle *Toby* could not be said to dismount his horse in this manner; for in strictness of language, he could not be said to dismount his horse at all—his horse rather flung him—and somewhat *viciously*, which made my uncle *Toby* take it ten times more unkindly" (6.34.417).

30. For this distinction between Kant and Burke, and the sublime and the beautiful, see Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Of particular relevance to Toby's situation is Ferguson's observation about the "complexity" of "the question of human beauty" in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*—which, she argues, he tries "to resolve by segregating the beautiful from the sublime" (75). "For if natural beauty is free in escaping any definite concept or purpose," Ferguson argues, "that humans can and do look beautiful to one another complicates the beautiful immeasurably. The beautiful continually labors under the fact that humans cannot help looking purposeful rather than purposive to one another. Moreover, from Kant's standpoint, they cannot help looking purposive to one another because they are" (75). Applied to *Tristram Shandy*, this distinction has the ironic effect of identifying Toby's war games as a natural, rather than human, phenomenon—which is, I think, precisely the tendency of Toby's "apologetical oration."

31. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 1:323.

32. Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 9–34; and Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 80–119.

33. On it-narratives, see the essays collected in Mark Blackwell, ed., *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007); Julie Park, *The Self and It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Jonathan Lamb, *The Things Things Say* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Christina Lupton, *Knowing Books: The Consciousness of Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

34. Lynch, *Economy of Character*, 82.

35. Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom*, ed. Jerry C. Beasley (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 4.

36. J. G. A. Pocock, "Virtues, Rights, and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 48.

37. See Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Sandra Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Stanford,

CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Chapter 1. Life without Theory in the *Life of Savage*

1. Muriel Spark, *Loitering with Intent* (New York: New Directions, 2001), 59.

2. Virginia Woolf, *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, 1932), 214–15.

3. Benjamin D'Israeli, *Contarini Fleming: A Psychological Romance* (London, 1853), 86.

4. Maureen Dowd, "Oprah's Bunk Club," *New York Times*, January 8, 2006.

5. James Frey, "A Note to the Reader," *New York Times*, February 1, 2006.

6. Spark, *Loitering with Intent*, 116.

7. For Woolf's views on biography and its relation to fiction, see Virginia Woolf, "The New Biography" and "The Art of Biography," in *Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 95–100, 116–26. In "The Art of Biography," Woolf argues that "the artist's imagination at its most intense fires out what is perishable in fact; he builds with what is durable; but the biographer must accept the perishable, build with it, embed it in the very fabric of his work. Much will perish; little will live" (122). For an illuminating account of Woolf on biography, see Ray Monk, "This Fictitious Life: Virginia Woolf on Biography and Reality," *Philosophy and Literature* 31:1 (2007): 1–40. Monk argues, "The central theme of 'The New Biography' is the difficulty of conveying the inner personality of a person through the *outer* records of their life, such as form the raw material from which biographies are written. It is her identification of this as *the* central problem of the entire genre of biography that allows her to present her review of [Lytton Strachey's] *Some People* as a series of reflections on Stracheyesque biography" (29). I have also benefitted from Monk's "Life without Theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding," *Poetics Today* 28:3 (2007): 527–70.

8. Boswell withholds final judgment on Savage's version of his life story—"I have . . . endeavored to sum up the evidence upon the case, as fairly as I can, and the result seems to be, that the world must vibrate in a state of uncertainty as to what was the truth"—but he clearly objects to "Johnson's partiality for Savage," which "made him entertain no doubt of his story, however extraordinary or improbable. It never occurred to him to question his being the son of the Countess of Macclesfield, of whose unrelenting barbarity he so loudly complained, and the particulars of which are related in so strong and affecting a manner in Johnson's life of him" (James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980], 127, 121). Many critics have suggested that Johnson's later writings on biography, especially *Rambler* 60, were intended to correct the errors of the *Life of Savage*. See, for example, Joseph Wood Krutch, *Samuel Johnson* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963), 82; William Vesterman, "Johnson and *The Life of Savage*," *ELH* 36:4 (1969): 660; and Robert Folkenflik, *Samuel Johnson, Biographer* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), 206.

9. Quoted in Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 120.

10. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 1:323.

11. Samuel Johnson, *An Account of the Life of Mr. Richard Savage*, in *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. John H. Middendorf, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 2:858. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

12. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 119.

13. Richard Holmes, *Dr. Johnson and Mr. Savage* (New York: Pantheon, 1993), 34.

14. John Hawkins, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, ed. Bertram H. Davis (1787; London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), 65. For an interesting reading of Hawkins's assessment of the *Life of Savage*, see Paul K. Alkon, "The Intention and Reception of Johnson's *Life of Savage*," *Modern Philology* 72:2 (1974): 139–50.

15. Frank Brady, "The Strategies of Biography and Some Eighteenth-Century Examples," *Literary Theory and Structure: Essays in Honor of William K. Wimsatt*, ed. Frank Brady, John Palmer, and Martin Price (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 251.

16. Brady, "Strategies of Biography," 255.

17. Brady, "Strategies of Biography," 255.

18. Brady, "Strategies of Biography," 252.

19. Blakey Vermeule, *The Party of Humanity: Writing Moral Psychology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 129, 134. Like Brady, Vermeule argues that the *Life of Savage* is defined by a structural tension—in her account, the conflict between its status as "a moralist's text" and as "perhaps the most direct appeal for sympathy in all of English literature" (122). "The conflict comes into play," she writes, "because Johnson chooses Richard Savage as the focus of both the text's demand for sympathy and its moralizing. Savage is at once the person to be sympathized with and the one who stands most in need of punitive correction" (123).

20. Vermeule, *Party of Humanity*, 140.

21. Vermeule, *Party of Humanity*, 141.

22. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, 1:19–25.

23. Samuel Johnson, *Life of Cowley*, in *The Lives of the Poets*, 1:20.

24. Samuel Johnson, *Life of Addison*, in *The Lives of the Poets*, 2:619.

25. Samuel Johnson, *Life of Roscommon*, in *The Lives of the Poets*, 1:247. Fred Parker comments perceptively on these moments in the *Lives* and argues persuasively for Johnson's persistent commitment to distance:

> One might expect that a gifted biographer would aim to fill in these gaps, to use a disciplined historical imagination to *interpret* their subject, to bring us in close, so to speak. Johnson does not write in this way. There are moments, to be sure, when he does suggest a close understanding, citing some anecdote or detail as if it were particularly revealing about his subject. But such passages are felt, often poignantly, as isolated moments in the narrative, suggesting a closeness that lasts no longer than the paragraph in which it is expressed; they are held against a more general insistence that we keep our distance, that we recognise the dimension of conjecture and speculation and so, by implication, the fictiveness of most biographical intimacy. ("Johnson and the Lives of Poets," *Cambridge Quarterly* 29:4 [2000], 327)

Parker notes Johnson's tendency to present alternative interpretations, "often signaled simply with the word 'or'" (327), and concludes that "the exact truth of the inner life is, often, beyond recovery; all the biographer can now report are facts that admit of more than one construction" (328). Against the idea that the "necessary fictiveness" of life writing makes the biographer finally, like the novelist, "a creative artist" (337), Parker argues that

Johnson's *Lives*, whose "format expresses the idea that the value of poetry lies in what *escapes* the biographical" (333), suggest that "true lives can be written *only* of poets" (337).

26. Samuel Johnson, *"The Idler" and "The Adventurer,"* ed. W. J. Bate, John M. Bullitt, and L. F. Powell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 262.

27. Folkenflick understands this emphasis on unspoken communication as a reflection of Johnson's "belief that man is a social animal—and the role that society plays in his own life" (*Samuel Johnson, Biographer*, 204–5).

28. Brady, "Strategies of Biography," 255.

29. Vermeule, *Party of Humanity*, 130.

30. Brady, "Strategies of Biography," 249, 248.

31. Brady, "Strategies of Biography," 248; Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 452.

32. As examples of this kind of thematic or generalized analysis of the *Life of Pope*, Brady cites Benjamin Boyce, "Samuel Johnson's Criticism of Pope in the *Life of Pope*," *Review of English Studies* 5 (1944): 37–46; F. W. Hilles, "The Making of the *Life of Pope*," in *New Light on Dr. Johnson*, ed. F. W. Hilles (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 257–84; and Paul Fussell, *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Writing* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), 246–78.

33. Brady, "Strategies of Biography," 249.

34. Hawkins, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, 64.

35. *The Life of Richard Savage* (London, 1727), 3, 9.

36. William H. Epstein, "Patronizing the Biographical Subject: Johnson's Savage and Pastoral Power," *Johnson after Two Hundred Years*, ed. Paul J. Korshin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 152.

37. Thomas Reinert, *Regulating Confusion: Samuel Johnson and the Crowd* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 102.

38. Reinert, *Regulating Confusion*, 98.

39. In fact, the 1727 *Life*, written to capitalize on Savage's notoriety during his trial, erroneously claims that he and his codefendants were charged with manslaughter rather than murder (21).

40. Bernard J. Brown, "The Demise of Chance Medley and the Recognition of Provocation as a Defense to Murder in English Law," *American Journal of Legal History* 7:4 (1963): 310.

41. On the rationalization and expansion of the realm of action and of the individual's responsibility for accidental harms in the eighteenth century, see Sandra Macpherson, *Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2010).

42. *Select Trials, for Murders, Robberies, Rapes, Sodomy, Coining, Frauds, and Other Offences: At the Sessions-House in the Old Bailey*, 2 vols. (London, 1734–35), 2:15. Hal Gladfelder has argued that the "double irony" of the confusion of Savage and Sinclair is that it reproduces the logic of Savage's attempt to assume "the character of the gentleman whose birth and manners immunized him from the necessity of ever doing anything that might look like work" ("The Hard Work of Doing Nothing: Richard Savage's Parallel Lives," *Modern Language Quarterly* 64:4 [2003]: 456). Gladfelder offers an insightful account of the reciprocity between Savage's life and works, but he fails to recognize that the most powerful link

between Savage and Sinclair is their lack of a "settled habitation" or "place of residence." This shared homelessness underscores their resemblance to one another, establishes their common subjection to chance and contingency, and sets in motion the chain of circumstances that brings them together.

43. Lawrence Lipking, *Samuel Johnson: The Life of an Author* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 77; Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1972), 363.

44. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 731.

45. For a reading of the *Life of Savage* that focuses on Johnson's conflation of literature and life in the service of the creation of "a rhetorically universal authority that shapes both his own literary career and the subjects of future literary lives," see Helen Deutsch, "'The Name of an Author': Moral Economics in Johnson's 'Life of Savage,'" *Modern Philology* 92:3 (1995): 329.

46. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 618. Johnson's account of the imagination's role in sympathetic identification is echoed by the second paragraph of Adam Smith's 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations" (*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1969], 47–48).

47. Johnson, *The Rambler*, 2:320.

48. Johnson, *The Rambler*, 2:320. For an interesting account of Johnson's use of "fictional life stories" in *The Rambler*, see Lisa Berglund, "Writing to Mr. Rambler: Samuel Johnson and Exemplary Autobiography," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 29 (2000): 242. Along similar lines, see Catherine N. Parke's comments on *The Rambler*'s "generic lives" (*Samuel Johnson and Biographical Thinking* [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991], 64).

49. Quoted in Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 24.

50. For a recent essay that touches on these issues, see Jenny Davidson, "The Minute Particular in Life-Writing and the Novel," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 48:3 (2015): 263–81. Davidson is concerned with the "productive tension that emerges in eighteenth-century British writing between an ethical argument against particularity . . . when writing about real historical figures" and "an increasingly dominant . . . aesthetic preference for specificity in both fictional and nonfictional forms" (265). Of particular relevance to this study is the essay's concluding gesture toward "an epistemological and ethical grid whose broad outlines were already perceived by writers heavily reliant on detail." Davidson's suggestion that the issue, "laid out with particular clarity by Sterne, remained strongly present in the mindset of British writers working in loosely realistic modes . . . over the second half of the eighteenth century" points to a key concern of the next chapter and an important literary-historical context for the book as a whole (278).

51. Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 121.

52. See Alkon's claim that "it is hard to infer much about the biography's form, meaning, or intentions from Sir Joshua Reynolds's account" ("Intention and Reception of Johnson's *Life of Savage*," 139).

53. Johnson, *Life of Addison*, in *The Lives of the Poets*, 1:647.

54. Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*, ed. George Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

55. Fredric Bogel offers a representative statement on the ambivalence of the conclusion to the *Life*: "Johnson's *Life of Savage* concludes twice, and in opposed ways, its last paragraph emphasizing the role of Savage's own character in his sufferings while the two preceding paragraphs insist on his 'Fortune,' his 'perpetual Hardships,' his 'Condition'; throughout, it supplies abundant evidence both that Savage is the victim of others and that he is principally his own victim; and its narrator at once sympathizes deeply with Savage and sharply criticizes his character and behavior" ("Johnson and the Role of Authority," *The New Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown [New York: Methuen, 1987], 197).

56. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Gary Wills (New York: Penguin, 2002), 138.

Chapter 2. Sterne and the Uses of Disorder

1. Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Gardner D. Stout Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 65. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

2. James Chandler makes a similar point in *An Archaeology of Sympathy: The Sentimental Mode in Literature and Criticism*: "The importance of order in *A Sentimental Journey* is signaled in the very first sentence, produced in medias res. . . . The fact of the interruptive dash without a sense of what it is interrupting, and of the pronoun without a referent, performs the problem of 'order' in itself" ([Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013], 377n8).

3. Thomas Keymer, "Sterne and Romantic Autobiography," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature from 1740 to 1830*, ed. Thomas Keymer and Jon Mee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 184, 175. In situating *Tristram Shandy* "in the larger context of first-person narrative discourse in the period, including non-fictional forms," Robert Folkenflick notes "the increased importance of subjectivity in autobiography" and argues that "Sterne's choice of autobiographical form connects *Tristram Shandy* to individual psychology, and helps mark what is sometimes called the 'inward turn of narrative'" ("*Tristram Shandy* and Eighteenth-Century Narrative," in *The Cambridge Companion to Laurence Sterne*, ed. Thomas Keymer [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 57, 60; Folkenflick quotes from Erich Kahler, *The Inward Turn of Narrative*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973], 182).

4. Earl Wasserman, *The Subtler Language: Critical Readings of Neoclassical and Romantic Poems* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959), 169.

5. Wasserman, *Subtler Language*, 170.

6. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1927), 164.

7. A recent letter in *Nature* illustrates just how difficult it is to generate true randomness (and, having done so, certify that it is genuinely random).

> From dice to modern electronic circuits there have been many attempts to build better devices to generate random numbers. Randomness is fundamental to security and cryptographic systems and to safeguarding privacy. A key challenge with random-number generators is that it is hard to ensure that their outputs are unpredictable. For a random-number generator based on a physical process, such as a noisy classical system or an elementary quantum measurement, a detailed model that describes the underlying physics is necessary to assert unpredictability.

The authors address the challenge of proving that a randomly generated sequence of numbers is not in fact "pseudorandom" by creating a protocol that "exploits the phenomenon of quantum non-locality" (Peter Bierhorst et al., "Experimentally Generated Randomness Certified by the Impossibility of Superluminal Signals," *Nature* 556 [2018]: 223–26).

8. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Gary Wills (New York: Penguin, 2002), 138.

9. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 1:321.

10. Christina Lupton, "Contingency, Codex, the Eighteenth-Century Novel," *ELH* 81 (2014): 1176.

11. Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 193.

12. Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 193.

13. Lupton, "Contingency," 1176.

14. See Molesworth's claim that "the quest to discover an organizing narrative represents, more often than not, a retreat from, rather than an advance toward, any rational principle" (*Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 204).

15. David Fairer, "Sentimental Translation in Mackenzie and Sterne," *Essays in Criticism* 49 (1999): 132.

16. John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 160, 159.

17. Fairer, "Sentimental Translation," 133.

18. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 160.

19. Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, ed. Peter Jones, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 1:301.

20. This is what I take the strange emphasis of Yorick's formulation to mean: "Any one may do a casual act of good nature, but a continuation of them shews it is a part of the temperature; and certainly, added I, if it is the same blood which comes from the heart, which descends to the extremes (touching her wrist) I am sure you must have one of the best pulses of any woman in the world—" (164).

21. The visual circuit of the scene with the Grisset recalls Tristram's encounter with Maria of Moulines in the ninth volume of *Tristram Shandy*, in the chapter titled "The Invocation": "MARIA look'd wistfully for some time at me, and then at her goat—and then at me—and then at her goat again, and so on alternately—" (*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvyn and Joan New [London: Penguin, 2003], 9.574; subsequent

references will be cited parenthetically in the text). More importantly, it establishes the pattern that structures Yorick's exchange with Maria in *A Sentimental Journey*: "I sat down close by her; and Maria let me wipe [her tears] away as they fell with my handkerchief—I then steep'd it in my own—and then in hers—and then in mine—and then I wip'd hers again—and as I did it, I felt such undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion" (271). For readings of these scenes, see Chandler, *Archaeology of Sympathy*, 154–57, 181–84.

One of the most striking scenes in Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* culminates in the description of a similar visual circuit of sympathetic exchange. Mackenzie's scene, which reflects on its own construction, is more elaborate than either of Sterne's, but the comparison is instructive:

> The house upon this farm was indeed little better than a hut; its situation, however, was pleasant, and Edwards, assisted by the beneficence of Harley, set about improving its neatness and convenience. He staked out a piece of the green before for a garden, and Peter, who acted in Harley's family as valet, butler, and gardener, had orders to furnish him with parcels of the different seeds he chose to sow on it. I have seen his master at work in this little spot, with his coat off, and his dibble in his hand: it was a scene of tranquil virtue to have stopped an angel on his errands of mercy! Harley had contrived to lead a little bubbling brook through a green walk in the middle of the ground, upon which he had erected a mill in miniature for the diversion of Edwards's infant-grandson, and made shift in its construction to introduce a pliant bit of wood, that answered with its fairy clack to the murmuring of the rill that turned it. I have seen him stand, listening to these mingled sounds, with his eye fixed on the boy, and the smile of conscious satisfaction on his cheek; while the old man, with a look half-turned to Harley, and half to Heaven, breathed an ejaculation of gratitude and piety. (*The Man of Feeling*, ed. Brian Vickers [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 75–76)

22. George Steiner describes Babel as "a second Fall, in some respects as desolate as the first," and his *After Babel* offers a wide-ranging survey of the philosophical and linguistic histories of the myth of an original language (*After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 61). For another broad survey of the idea of a philosophical language, see Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, trans. James Fentress (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). In *The Tempter's Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature*, Eric Jager focuses on medieval responses to the idea of the Fall, arguing that "biblical commentators, moralists, and poets used the Fall to address practical and theoretical problems of language relating to literature, knowledge, power, society, and eros" ([Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993], 1). For a more detailed study of the universal language movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see James Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes in England and France, 1600–1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975); and for an account of universal language's place in the context of the study of language from the seventeenth century into the nineteenth, see Murray Cohen, *Sensible Words: Linguistic Practice in England, 1640–1785* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967).

23. The phrase is from a 1646 letter from Robert Boyle to Samuel Hartlib—who, like Wilkins, was working toward the creation of a common language (quoted in Knowlson, *Universal Language Schemes*, 9–10).

24. Jorge Luis Borges, "John Wilkins' Analytical Language," in *Selected Nonfictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin 1999), 229–32. Borges traces Wilkins's aspiration back to Descartes, who, he observes, "in a letter dated November 1619, had already noted that, by using the decimal system of numeration, we could learn in a single day to name all quantities to infinity, and to write them in a new language, the language of numbers; he also proposed the creation of a similar, general language that would organize and contain all human thought. Around 1664, John Wilkins undertook that task" (230).

25. Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 5. Derrida is quoting Condillac's *Essay on the Origins of Human Knowledge*.

26. Condillac, *Essay on the Origins of Human Knowledge*, quoted in Derrida, "Signature Event Context," 5.

27. See Stanley E. Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972).

28. Victor Shklovsky, "A Parodying Novel: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*," in *Laurence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Traugott (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 72.

29. Shklovsky, "A Parodying Novel," 68, 72.

30. Shklovsky, "A Parodying Novel," 69.

31. Shklovsky, "A Parodying Novel," 69, 72.

32. Quoted in W. B. Gerard, *Laurence Sterne and the Visual Imagination* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 55.

33. Brewster Rogerson, "The Art of Painting the Passions," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 14:1 (1953): 70, quoted in Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 178. Tristram explicitly refers to the tradition mocked by his descriptive technique: "This I recommend to painters;—need I add,—to orators?—I think not; for, unless they practice it,—they must fall upon their noses" (2.17.107–8).

34. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 178.

35. William V. Holtz, *Image and Immortality: A Study of* Tristram Shandy (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1970), 59.

36. Sterne highlights Tristram's observation by self-reflexively applying it to himself and his book—"You Messrs. the monthly Reviewers!—how could you cut and slash my jerkin as you did?—how did you know, but you would cut my lining too!" (3.4.145). Here Sterne's book is his jerkin, and in attacking it the reviewers have assailed his body and mind as well.

37. Jonathan Lamb, "Sterne and Irregular Oratory," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 154.

38. Lamb, "Sterne and Irregular Oratory," 155.

39. In chapter 3 I argue that Smollett's "flat" characters should also be understood as "occasions" or "circumstances"—and in chapter 5 I suggest that even "round" characters like Austen's depend on a similarly contextual principle of structure.

40. For an instructive account of the role of context in *Tristram Shandy*, see George P.

Landow, "*Tristram Shandy* and the Comedy of Context," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 7:3 (1966): 208–24.

41. On the significance of such connective networks in the sentimental novel and especially *A Sentimental Journey*, see Jonathan Lamb, *Preserving the Self in the South Seas, 1680–1840* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 263–80; Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 67–110; and Deidre Lynch, "Personal Effects and Sentimental Fictions," in *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Mark Blackwell (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 63–91.

42. Melvyn New, "Sterne and the Narrative of Determinateness," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 4 (1992): 316. New alludes to Forster's claim about *Tristram Shandy* in *Aspects of the Novel*, but his critique focuses on recent Sterne scholarship, including J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative Middles: A Preliminary Outline," *Genre* 11 (1978): 375–87; Wolfgang Iser, *Laurence Sterne: "Tristram Shandy"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and especially Jonathan Lamb, *Sterne's Fiction and the Double Principle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

43. New, "Sterne and the Narrative of Determinateness," 320.

44. New, "Sterne and the Narrative of Determinateness," 318, 326.

45. Jonathan Lamb, "Language and Hartleian Associationism in *A Sentimental Journey*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 13:3 (1980): 288.

46. Lamb, "Language and Hartleian Associationism," 287.

47. In Lamb's account, "situations" are inflected in different ways by chance and accident and are thereby transformed into "arrangements" or "cases" ("Language and Hartleian Associationism," 291, 292).

48. Chandler, *Archaeology of Sympathy*, xv, xiv.

49. Nassim Talib, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 2010), 178.

50. *Monthly Review* 38 (April 1768): 319; quoted in Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Katherine Turner (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2010), 229.

51. See, for example, *Yorick's Sentimental Journey, Continued: To which is prefixed, Some Account of the Life and Writings of Mr Sterne, by Eugenius*, 2 vols. (London, 1769); *Continuation of Yorick's Sentimental Journey* (London, 1788); and *A Sentimental Journey: Intended as a Sequel to Mr Sterne's through Italy, Switzerland, and France; In Two Volumes; By Mr Shandy* (Southampton and London, 1793). Gardiner D. Stout Jr., argues that editors of *A Sentimental Journey* err when they "close the opening Sterne left to equivocal strictures between 'Chambre's' and 'END' by inserting a dash after 'Chambre's— ' [*sic*]; and many compound the error by omitting 'END OF VOL. II'" (291). For an account of Sterne's novels as intentional fragments, see Elizabeth W. Harries, "Sterne's Novels: Gathering Up the Fragments," *ELH* 49:1 (1982): 35–49.

52. Shklovsky, "A Parodying Novel," 89.

Chapter 3. From Map to Network in *Humphry Clinker*

1. "On the English Novelists," in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930–33), 6:106.

2. Hazlitt, "On the English Novelists," 6:106. Hazlitt's quotation is from Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning*.

3. Hazlitt, "On the English Novelists," 6:106.

4. Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Gardner D. Stout Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 171.

5. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

6. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "statistics."

7. This is Charlotte Sussman's characterization of how scholarship has regarded *Humphry Clinker* (*Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Society, 1713–1833* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000], 81).

8. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 33.

9. See Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

10. In conceiving of society as more than the aggregate of individuals, Smollett anticipates a key insight of systems theory as it was formulated by Niklas Luhmann. Along similar lines, like Latour, in *Humphry Clinker* he points toward a conception of the social as a process of assembling rather than a kind of material or an established domain. These are significant affinities, but I do not mean to suggest that Smollett is a social theorist in the modern sense; he is an unsystematic systems thinker. There is no indication in *Humphry Clinker*, for example, that society is a self-regulating system (quite the opposite, in fact); nor is there any suggestion that networked systems of transportation or communication possess any form of agency. Smollett's interest in networked systems has to do with the representational possibilities they afford the novelist and the perspective they offer the social critic. While this way of thinking about systems constitutes a significant moment in the prehistory of sociology, its connections to contemporary social theory are perhaps more suggestive than substantive. See Niklas Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, trans. Peter Gilgen (2002; Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); and Latour, *Reassembling the Social*.

11. Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 33.

12. Wolfgang Iser argues that in *Humphry Clinker* "the picaro, whose first-person account had combined the most heterogeneous exploits into the unity of the picaresque novel, now has lost its prime function" (*The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* [1972; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974], 68).

13. For John Barrell, the titles of Smollett's early novels epitomize their episodic nature. His point of contrast is *The History of Tom Jones*, "a title that suggests that one event will connect with another, rather than that one will simply *follow* another, as is suggested by such titles as *The Adventures of . . .* Peregrine Pickle or Roderick Random" (*English Literature in History 1730–80: An Equal, Wide Survey* [London: Hutchinson, 1983], 177). Iser remarks on Smollett's departure from the picaresque pattern in *Humphry Clinker*, arguing that "the episodes have to be broken down into various perspectives to show that they, too, are experienced by individual characters, and that their significance is only to be seen in the variations of different people's viewpoints" (*Implied Reader*, 68). Iser's observation about the importance of *Humphry Clinker*'s multiple perspectives echoes throughout the criticism

on the novel; it is frequently suggested that this fracturing of the narrative leaves it to the reader to determine the "truth" or the significance of the actions the novel describes. I will return to this issue to suggest that this claim is more formally than practically true. The contention is a plausible observation about *Humphry Clinker*'s structure, but it fails to capture the experience of reading the novel and, more importantly, mistakes Smollett's purposes.

14. Paul-Gabriel Boucé notes that "round about 1771 there was not only a craze for travel-books . . . but also a vogue for the epistolary novel" (*The Novels of Tobias Smollett*, trans. Antonia White [London: Longman, 1976], 192–93).

15. Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, ed. Lewis M. Knapp, rev. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 36. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

16. This approach to the novel begins with Horace Walpole's comment that *Humphry Clinker* is "a party novel, written by the profligate hireling Smollett, to vindicate the Scots and cry down justice" (*Memoirs of the Reign of King George the Third*, ed. Denis Le Marchant, rev. G. F. Russell Barker, 4 vols. [London, 1894], 4:218). Eric Rothstein opens his influential assessment of Smollett's "Scotophile" agenda in *Humphry Clinker* by quoting Walpole ("Scotophilia and *Humphry Clinker*: The Politics of Beggary, Bugs, and Buttocks," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 52:1 [1982]: 63–78). See also Wolfgang Franke, "Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* as a 'Party Novel,'" *Studies in Scottish Literature* 9 (1971–72): 97–106; and Byron Gassman, "The *Briton* and *Humphry Clinker*," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 3 (1963): 397–414.

17. Sussman, *Consuming Anxieties*, 83. For Sussman, national identity is a "compensatory fantasy" designed to obscure "the growing connectedness of English and colonial society" (82). For other accounts of the novel that see the consolidation of national identity as its central concern, see Robert Crawford, *Devolving English Literature* (Clarendon, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), 66–75; Leith Davis, *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707–1830* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 72; Janet Sorensen, *The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 104–37; Evan Gottlieb, *Feeling British: Sympathy and National Identity in Scottish and English Writing, 1707–1832* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 61–98; and Juliet Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 83–109. On the development of British national identity in the long eighteenth century more generally, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992). Finally, on Smollett's critique of commerce, see John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and Susan L. Jacobsen, "'The Tinsel of the Times': Smollett's Argument against Conspicuous Consumption in *Humphry Clinker*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 9 (1996): 71–89.

18. In addition to the Oxford World's Classics Edition, edited by Knapp and Boucé, see also the two Norton Critical Editions (the first edited by James L. Thorson [New York: W. W. Norton, 1983], the second by Evan Gottlieb [New York: W. W. Norton, 2015]), and the Georgia Edition, edited by Thomas R. Preston and O. M. Brack Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990).

19. Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel 1800–1900* (New York: Verso, 1998), 33.

20. Moretti, *Atlas*, 4, 33.

21. Since *Atlas of the European Novel*, Moretti's work has moved decidedly in the direction of quantitative analysis (see his *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* [New York: Verso, 2005]; and *Distant Reading* [New York: Verso, 2013]). In "Conjectures on World Literature" (included in *Distant Reading* but first published in *New Left Review* 1 [January/February 2000]: 54–68), Moretti at once offers an argument for distant reading and marks the limits of the practice with respect to the analysis of individual novels.

22. Moretti, *Atlas*, 3.

23. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 84.

24. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 89, 81. Sussman's reading of transculturation in *Humphry Clinker* works along precisely these lines (*Consuming Anxieties*, 81–109).

25. Michael Rosenblum, "Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 183.

26. Rosenblum, "Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*," 183.

27. Many critics have commented on *Humphry Clinker*'s epistolary form (see, for example, Janet Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1982], 172–76; and Boucé, *Novels of Tobias Smollett*, 191–99); few have considered the postal system's contribution to the novel. Janet Sorenson is an exception, but she understands its function exclusively in terms of the consolidation of British national identity. Smollett, she writes, "depicts postal networks as figures of national interconnectedness and represents letter-writing . . . as the literate practice which could mediate between a public, perhaps national, and a private self" (*Grammar of Empire*, 105). On the building and improvement of roads in eighteenth-century Britain, see Greg Laugero, "Infrastructures of Enlightenment: Road-Making, the Public Sphere, and the Emergence of Literature," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29:1 (1995): 45–67. For histories of the establishment of the British postal service, see Frank Staff, *The Penny Post, 1680–1918* (1966; London: Lutterworth Press, 1993); and Benjamin Boyce, *The Benevolent Man: A Life of Ralph Allen of Bath* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

28. Rosenblum, "Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*," 183; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 84; Moretti, *Atlas*, 34.

29. Bramble's condition reflects another generic context for the novel: *Humphry Clinker*'s critique of the sentimental novel, which domesticates Sterne's sentimental journey and lampoons Henry Mackenzie's man of feeling. Early on, Bramble's complaints suggest that he is a misanthrope, but it quickly becomes clear that his hostility and resentment disguise his genuine good nature. In fact, his apparent lack of sympathy for others is the product of an excess of sensibility; he cannot "bear the slightest touch without flinching" because he feels too deeply (49). As Gottlieb puts it, "Bramble's increased capacity for sympathy has rendered him unfit for society" (*Feeling British*, 24). From a different perspective, Bramble's sensitivity and hypochondria also serve as the basis for the novel's analogy between bodily and national health (see Ronald Paulson, *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967], 194–96).

30. It gets worse. After inquiring about "the construction of the pump and cistern," Bramble comes to suspect "that there is, or may be, some regurgitation from the bath into

the cistern of the pump. In that case," he continues, "what a delicate beverage is every day quaffed by the drinkers; medicated with the sweat and dirt, and dandriff; and the abominable discharges of various kind, from twenty different diseased bodies, parboiling in the kettle below." And worse. In an attempt to avoid the contamination of the baths, Bramble makes "recourse to the spring that supplies the private baths on the Abbey-green." After perceiving "something extraordinary in the taste and smell," he discovers that the private spring filters through "an old burying ground . . . so that as we drink the decoction of living bodies at the Pump-room, we swallow the strainings of rotten bones and carcasses at the private bath" (46).

31. Bramble's allusion to Hamlet's remark to Horatio about the gravedigger's refinement —"the age is grown so pick'd that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier, he galls his kibe"—marks the historical and literary-historical genealogy of his objection to the mixing of social classes (*Hamlet*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974], 5.1.139–41).

32. For Sussman, this passage emblematizes *Humphry Clinker*'s anxiety about colonial expansion and the challenge it poses to English national identity (104–5). By contrast, I am suggesting that the scene—and, more generally, the novel's depictions of Bath and London—does not so much imagine a threat to the social order as articulate a principle of social connection. The threatening state of affairs Smollett depicts has already been realized, and, because he describes a principle rather than a possibility, the kind of resistance or "compensatory fantasy" Sussman envisions is impossible (*Consuming Anxieties*, 82).

33. Frances Burney, *Evelina* (New York: Norton, 1965), 19.

34. On correction, punishment, and the disciplinary subject of the romance novel, see Stacey Margolis, "The Rules of the Game: Punishment in *The Wide Wide World*," in *The Public Life of Privacy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 51–77; and Mark Canuel, "Jane Austen, the Romantic Novel, and the Importance of Being Wrong," in *The Shadow of Death: Literature, Romanticism, and the Subject of Punishment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 81–114.

35. William Hazlitt, "On the English Novelists," 6:124, quoted in Susan Staves, "*Evelina*; or, Female Difficulties," *Modern Philology*, 73:4, part 1 (1976): 369.

36. Staves, "Female Difficulties," 376.

37. Staves, "Female Difficulties," 376.

38. As Staves puts it, "Incident after incident is generated by an arrangement of circumstances which make it appear that Evelina is guilty of some indelicacy and therefore simply another member of the group of comic characters" ("Female Difficulties," 376).

39. Smollett, *Humphry Clinker*, 88.

40. By contrast, in London, Bramble remarks on how the city has improved: "It must be allowed, indeed, for the credit of the present age, that London and Westminster are much better paved and lighted than they were formerly. The new streets are spacious, regular, and airy; and the houses generally convenient. The Bridge at Blackfriars is a noble monument of taste and public spirit. . . . But," he continues, "notwithstanding these improvement, the capital is become an overgrown monster." If the built city is well ordered, its rapidly expanding population is in the process of overmatching it and transforming it into "an immense wilderness," despite its improved infrastructure (87).

41. For analyses of these kinds of readings, see Staves, "Female Difficulties"; and Marshall Brown's chapter on *The Vicar of Wakefield* in *Preromanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 141–80.

42. John Zomchick argues that, at the end of the novel, "*Humphry Clinker* represses the strident voice of an emergent culture—as embodied in the mob—through solutions that transform social relations into more manageable personal or familial ones" ("Social Class, Character, and Narrative Strategy in *Humphry Clinker*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 10:3 [1986]: 175). What I am calling the failure of *Humphry Clinker*'s resolution has to do with the sense in which, given the scale of its vision of British society, the end of the novel necessarily feels like nostalgic retrenchment and its solutions appear entirely imaginary. If Bramble's estate is a model and his household a microcosm, Smollett has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that the Britain they would preserve or renovate no longer exists. This distance is captured in the neologism Win offers to describe the triple marriage that concludes the novel: "mattermoney" reveals the basis that underwrites these unions by intimating that commercial society has made the claims of lineage and class irrelevant (352).

43. On the association of women and luxury in *Humphry Clinker*, see Sekora, *Luxury*, 256–65; and Aileen Douglas, *Uneasy Sensations: Smollett and the Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 172–75.

44. In this, *Humphry Clinker*'s epistolarity differs sharply from the conception of letter writing as intimate, and gendered, exchange that informs Bernhard Siegert's account of the postal service's role in the development of modern literature (*Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. Kevin Repp [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999]).

45. By his own account, Ralph Allen's contribution to the regularization of the mail service involved not only the establishment of new connections but also the regulation of existing networks: "He contrived that every Postmaster on the same Road, in all the Branches in the same road, shou'd check and be checked, even to operate reciprocally between the Postmasters on different Roads, by means of certain regulations" (*Ralph Allen's Own Narrative, 1720–1761*, ed. Adrian E. Hopkins [Bath, UK: Postal History Society, 1960], 17).

46. Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 87.

47. Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom*, ed. O. M. Brack Jr. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 4.

48. Barrell, *English Literature in History*, 201, 203.

49. Barrell, *English Literature in History*, 201. For the seminal account of the civic humanist ideal that informs Barrell's argument, see J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); and *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

50. Barrell, *English Literature in History*, 177.

51. Barrell, *English Literature in History*, 177.

52. Samuel Johnson, "Life of Cowley," in *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. John H. Mittendorf, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 1:26.

53. Hazlitt, "On the English Novelists," 6:106.

Chapter 4. Godwin's Handshake

1. William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. David McCracken (1794; New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 29. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

2. Herman Roodenburg, "The 'Hand of Friendship': Shaking Hands and Other Gestures in the Dutch Republic," in *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 174.

3. William Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (1793; Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1985), 756.

4. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (1790; Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1986), 170.

5. This story frequently appears in popular histories of human culture (see, for example, Michael Sims, *Adam's Navel: A Natural and Cultural History of the Human Form* [New York: Viking, 2003], 152).

6. Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, vol. 2 (New York: Appleton, 1888), 135.

7. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 136. In *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne imagines a different version of this primal scene of social encounter in Yorick's meeting with a stranger as he enters the concert hall in Milan. Yorick is

> just entering the door of the hall, when the Marquesina di F*** was coming out in a sort of hurry—she was almost upon me before I saw her; so I gave a spring to one side to let her pass—She had done the same, and on the same side too; so we ran our heads together: she instantly got to the other side to get out: I was just as unfortunate as she had been; for I had sprung to that side, and opposed her passage again—We both flew together to the other side, and then back—and so on—it was ridiculous; we both blush'd intolerably; so I did at last the thing I should have done first—I stood stock still, and the Marquesina had no more difficulty. (*A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Gardner D. Stout Jr. [Berkeley: University of California Press], 172)

After the Marquesina finally passes and walks up the stairs, Yorick "ran and begg'd pardon for the embarrassment I had given her, saying it was my intention to have made her way. She answered, she was guided by the same intention towards me—so we reciprocally thank'd each other" (173). Yorick walks her to her coach and, as he hands her in, says, "Upon my word, Madame . . . I made six different efforts to let you go out—And I made six different efforts, replied she, to let you enter—I wish to heaven I had made a seventh, said I—With all my heart, said she, making room—Life is too short to be long about the forms of it—so I instantly stepp'd in, and he carried me home with her—And what became of the concert, St. Cecilia, who, I suppose, was at it, knows more than I" (173). This scene offers a different account of how an "irregular" action becomes "regular and rhythmical," but, as Yorick and the Marquesina's awkward movements and mutual blushes make clear, the resultant reciprocity is intimate rather than social.

8. Spencer, *Principles of Sociology*, 134.

9. Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Private and Public* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 321, 327.

10. Firth, *Symbols*, 326.

11. Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing (1972; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 34.

12. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (1939; New York: Urizen Books, 1978), xi.

13. For complementary accounts of the classical handshake, see Gabriel Herman, *Ritualized Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 49–53; and Alan L. Boegehold, *When a Gesture was Expected: A Selection of Examples from Archaic and Classical Greek Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 23–24.

14. Anthony Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 21.

15. Firth, *Symbols*, 321.

16. We might understand Godwin's recourse to the handshake as a particularly dramatic gesture as a reflection on English reserve. In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres*, for example, Adam Smith remarks, "The behaviour which is reckoned polite in England is a calm, composed, unpassionate serenity noways ruffled by passion. Foreigners observe that there is no nation in the world which use so little gesticulation in their conversation as the English. A Frenchman in telling a story that was not of the least consequence to him or any one else will use 1000 gestures and contortions of his face, whereas a well bread Englishman will tell you one wherein his life and fortune are concerned without altering a muscle in his face" (*The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, vol. 4, ed. J. C. Bryce [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], 198).

17. Firth, *Symbols*, 301, 327.

18. Godwin, *Political Justice*, 758.

19. Godwin, *Political Justice*, 218.

20. On Godwin's critique of promises, see Ian Balfour, "Promises, Promises: Social and Other Contracts in the English Jacobins (Godwin/Inchbald)," in *New Romanticisms: Theory and Critical Practice*, ed. David L. Clark and Donald C. Goellnicht (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 225–50; and Angela Esterhammer, "Godwin's Suspicion of Speech Acts," *Studies in Romanticism* 39:4 (2000): 553–78.

21. Here Caleb rehearses the argument of Hume's "Of Refinement in the Arts" (in *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller [Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1985], 268–80).

22. Tyrrel points to another dimension of the novel's allegory of national difference when he calls Falkland a "Frenchified rascal" (54).

23. Burke, *Reflections*, 170. On Falkland and Burke, see, for example, P. N. Furbank, "Godwin's Novels," *Essays in Criticism* 5:3 (1955): 214–28; David McCracken, "Godwin's *Caleb Williams*: A Fictional Rebuttal of Burke," *Studies in Burke and His Time* 11:2 (1969–70): 1442–52; and Marilyn Butler, "Godwin, Burke, and *Caleb Williams*," *Essays in Criticism* 32:3 (1982): 237–57.

24. Burke, *Reflections*, 170.

25. Furbank, "Godwin's Novels," 215. Of the "intermittent association" between Burke and Falkland, Marilyn Butler remarks, "This cannot be all. Falkland has a far wider range of reference than merely to Burke" (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975],

70). For an acute assessment of the critical history of the novel's political allegory, see Robert Kaufman, "The Sublime as Super-Genre of the Modern, or *Hamlet* in Revolution: Caleb Williams and His Problems," *Studies in Romanticism* 36:4 (1997): 546–67.

26. While Falkland and Caleb's relationship and its political implications might be understood in terms of the oedipal structure and the slaying of the father, which are so evident in *Caleb Williams* and in the gothic in general, reading the novel in this way misses the full scope of Godwin's political allegory. An interpretation like Alex Gold's, for example, which argues convincingly for the close relationship between the novel's psychological dynamics and its political significance by pointing out the symmetry between Caleb's story and Freud's account of paranoia (as a symptom of repressed homosexuality), elucidates one aspect of the novel (Caleb's vexed relation to Falkland) in a way that obscures other features of Godwin's analytical project (for example, the historical specificity of Caleb's problem) (see Gold, "It's Only Love: The Politics of Passion in Godwin's *Caleb Williams*," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 19:2 [1977]: 135–60). Conversely, historicist approaches run the risk of construing the novel's conception of politics too narrowly. For example, while Caleb's paranoia certainly reflects the political paranoia of the 1790s (see Thomas Pfau, "Paranoia Historicized: Legal Fantasy, Social Change, and Satiric Meta-commentary in the 1794 Treason Trials," in *Romanticism, Radicalism, and the Press*, ed. Stephen C. Behrendt [Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997], 30–64), the historical transformation Godwin examines in *Caleb Williams* is complicated in crucial ways precisely because it is not finally circumscribed by the understanding of politics that defined the French Revolution debate.

27. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1791; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 60.

28. Burke, *Reflections*, 177.

29. Paine, *Rights of Man*, 49, 50.

30. Paine, *Rights of Man*, 70, 71.

31. *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1930–33), 11:28. On the peculiar connection between Caleb's scientific bent and his love of narrative, see Christian Thorne, "Providence in the Early Novel, or Accident If You Please," *Modern Language Quarterly* 64:3 (2003): 323–25. In addition to the "natural philosopher," Caleb also resembles another Enlightenment type, the literary hack, who makes his living by writing and hopes to support himself by serving as a secretary to a great man and patron like Falkland. See Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

32. Ronald Paulson addresses the dynamic of inheritance in the gothic more generally. See his *Representations of Revolution, 1789–1820* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 215–47.

33. Here one could cite such later examples of the double as E. T. A. Hoffman's "The Sandman," James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Edgar Allen Poe's "William Wilson," and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. On the centrality of doubling and self-division to the gothic more generally, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (1980; New York: Methuen, 1986).

34. On Falkland's name and political allegory in the gothic, see Paulson, *Representations of Revolution*, 238–39.

35. For studies that explore the role that hands, both literal and metaphorical, play in

gothic possession, see Stefan Andriopoulos, "The Invisible Hand: Supernatural Agency in Political Economy and the Gothic Novel," *ELH* 66:3 (1999): 739–58; and Katherine Rowe, *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 111–59. On hands in the nineteenth-century novel, see, in relation to sexuality, William A. Cohen, "Manual Conduct in *Great Expectations*," *ELH* 60:1 (1993): 217–59; and, in relation to work, Elaine Scarry, "Work and the Body in Hardy and Other Nineteenth-Century Novelists," in *Resisting Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 49–90.

36. Godwin, *Political Justice*, 261.

37. Godwin, *Political Justice*, 758.

38. Godwin, *Political Justice*, 761.

39. E. J. Hobsbawm's classic study of "primitive" radical social movements offers further coordinates for placing Raymond's politics. See his *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1959; New York: W. W. Norton, 1965).

40. On Caleb's solitude, see Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 97–113.

41. Godwin, *Political Justice*, 761.

42. On the symbolism of dress in the French Revolution, see, for example, Neil Hertz on the cap of liberty ("Medusa's Head: Male Hysteria under Political Pressure," in *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985], 179–91); and Lynn Hunt on the sans-culottes (*Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986], 76–81).

43. On political patronage and corruption in the eighteenth century, see Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); and W. A. Speck, *Stability and Strife: England, 1714–1760* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).

44. J. G. A. Pocock, "Virtues, Rights, and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 48–49. See also "The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology," in *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 103–23; and *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

45. Pocock, "Virtues, Rights, and Manners," 44. For a contrasting account of Godwin and republicanism, see Jon Klancher, "Godwin and the Republican Romance: Genre, Politics, and Contingency in Cultural History," *Modern Language Quarterly* 56:2 (1995): 145–65.

46. In chapter 6 of *Political Justice*, Godwin identifies the right of private judgment as "the most essential of those rights which constitute the peculiar sphere appropriate to each individual, and the right upon which every other depends as its basis" (200).

47. Developing such a reading in detail is beyond the scope of my argument in this chapter. I offer these speculations, however, because they point to a line of inquiry into Godwin's political philosophy and the novel's contribution to philosophical speculation that is worth pursuing. I am grateful to David Collings for this suggestion. Collings's own reading of *Caleb Williams*—which traces "the emergence of a negative definition both of

identity and of justice" and argues that at the end of the novel "Caleb finds his place in the world of a mutable and progressive reason, one whose ultimate form must also be retrospective, knowable only in the future perfect tense, beyond reach from within history as it is actually lived"—examines the philosophical implications of the novel's conclusion ("The Romance of the Impossible: William Godwin in the Empty Place of Reason," *ELH* 70 [2003]: 861).

48. Pocock, "Virtues, Rights, and Manners," 49.

Chapter 5. Jane Austen and the Morphology of the Marriage Plot

1. For a striking expression of this line of thought, see Frances Ferguson's claim "that free indirect style is the novel's one and only formal contribution to literature" ("Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," *Modern Language Quarterly* 61:1 [2000]: 159).

2. Reginald Farrer, "Jane Austen, ob. July 18, 1817," *Quarterly Review* (July 1917), in B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 2:249, 250, and quoted in Janine Barchas, *Matters of Fact in Jane Austen: History, Location, and Celebrity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 7.

3. Tony Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 104.

4. Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 294.

5. Alistair Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971); Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*; William Galperin, *The Historical Austen* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

6. Walter Scott, unsigned review of *Emma*, *Quarterly Review* (dated October 1815, issued March 1816), quoted in B. C. Southam, *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, 1:64, 67.

7. Scott, review of *Emma*, 71.

8. "Jane Austen," in *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, 4 vols., ed. Andrew McNeillie (1925–1928; New York: Harcourt, 1994), 4:152.

9. Scott, review of *Emma*, 67–68.

10. Scott, review of *Emma*, 69, 71.

11. *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier* (London, 1898), 128, quoted in Southam, *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, 1:13–14.

12. Quoted in Southam, *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, 1:60.

13. Maria Edgeworth, letter to Sneyd and Harriet Edgeworth, 1816, quoted in Marilyn Butler, *Maria Edgeworth: A Literary Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 445; and Adela Pinch, introduction to Jane Austen, *Emma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), vii.

14. Colin Jager's reading of *Emma* in relation to the history of secularization develops a version of this line of thinking about the novel by suggesting that Emma's achievement is arriving at a point at which she "wishes for nothing." See Jager, *Unquiet Things: Secularism in the Romantic Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 76–96.

15. *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 337.

16. Walter Scott, March 14, 1826, journal entry, quoted in Southam, *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, 2:6.

17. D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University

Press, 2003). The quotation comes from the back cover of Miller's book. Strangely, despite appearing there within quotation marks, these sentences do not appear in the book. In the text, their closest approximation is Miller's description of Austen's style as "her great world-historical achievement, which is to have established, within the boundlessly oppressive imperiums of gender, conjugality, and the Person, something like extraterritoriality" (75). For an account of the implications Miller's formalism, see Frances Ferguson, "Now It's Personal: D. A. Miller and Too-Close Reading," *Critical Inquiry* 41:1 (2015): 521–40.

18. *Jane Austen's Letters*, 287.

19. While her conclusions differ from mine, Yoon Sun Lee's account of Austen and scale makes a powerful case for the novels' abstraction. See her "Austen's Scale-Making," *Studies in Romanticism* 52:2 (2013): 171–95.

20. See, for example, Nancy Armstrong's claim that because the novels "deal with a closed community of polite country people . . . social relations appear to be virtually the same thing as domestic relations" (*Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1987], 135).

21. Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 24.

22. Propp, *Morphology*, xxv.

23. Propp, *Morphology*, 20.

24. Propp, *Morphology*, 21.

25. Propp, *Morphology*, 5.

26. Propp, *Morphology*, 21.

27. Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 179. References to Austen's novels are to the Oxford World's Classics Editions and are identified in the text: *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *Mansfield Park*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *Emma*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *Persuasion*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sanditon*, ed. James Kinsley and John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

28. Fredric Jameson, taking up Claude Lévi-Strauss's critique of *Morphology of the Folktale*, argues that Propp's analysis is, on the one hand, insufficiently formal (its functions are sorted into "storytelling categories") and, on the other, "*not yet meaningful enough*" (because, unlike Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis, it remains committed to narrative "irreversibility"—what Jameson calls "the movement of storytelling in time"). Propp's "basic error," Jameson concludes, is "to have rewritten the primary narratives *in terms of another narrative*, rather than in terms of a synchronic system" (*The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981], 121–22). This critique, while it makes sense from the standpoint of Lévi-Strauss's cultural anthropology, which does not distinguish between folktales and other cultural practices, falls flat in an account the object of which is to understand narrative as a socially symbolic act. Jameson, like Propp and like Austen (and unlike Lévi-Strauss), is ostensibly concerned with literature as a distinct form of cultural production—one that exists alongside other cultural forms and that has a significant (indeed, symbolic) relation to the social world. This is to say, first, that Propp's

interest is narrative structure rather than structure per se and, second, that Austen's formalism reflects a conviction that the novel's relation to social structure might be analytical rather than exemplary. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Structure and Form," in *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 2, trans. Monique Layton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 115–45.

29. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 81, 84.

30. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 89.

31. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 89.

32. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 85, 87.

33. Michael Rosenbaum, "Smollett's *Humphry Clinker*," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 183.

34. In this sense, Said shares Jameson's conviction that narrative is a socially symbolic act.

35. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 33.

36. Scott, review of *Emma*, 64.

37. This is a very small example of what it means to consider the novel, following Sandra Macpherson, as "less an adventure of interiority than of emplotment" (*Harm's Way: Tragic Responsibility and the Novel Form* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010], 10).

38. Caroline Bingley's remarks about the gallery at Pemberley (which point ahead to the scene late in *Pride and Prejudice* in which Elizabeth confronts Darcy's portrait) and Emma's mimicry of Miss Bates (which prefigures her public mockery of Miss Bates at Box Hill) are similarly strange examples of novelistic typology.

39. See, for example, Joseph W. Donohue Jr., "Ordination and the Divided House at Mansfield Park," *ELH* 32:2 (1965): 174; Ann Banfield, "The Moral Landscape of *Mansfield Park*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 26:1 (1971): 16–17; and Colin Jager, *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 148. On the broader, allegorical significance of the scene, see Everett Zimmerman, "Jane Austen and *Mansfield Park*: A Discrimination of Ironies," *Studies in the Novel* 1:3 (1969), who remarks that "at Sotherton the party moves from the brilliance of sunshine into the darkness of the wilderness, leaving Fanny alone in the shade" (351); and Stefanie Markovits, "Jane Austen and the Happy Fall," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 47:4 (2007), who notes, in *Mansfield Park*, "the new presence of allegory, most obviously in the 'wilderness' scenes at Sotherton, where 'serpentine' paths, locked gates, missing keys, and the risks of 'slipping into the ha-ha' take on symbolic resonance previously outside of Austen's territory" (787).

40. I thank Marcie Frank for this insight.

41. See, for instance, Deidre Lynch's observation that "the wonderful thing about how *Emma* handles its central courtship plot is that Austen contrives to narrate what will be discovered to have been a foregone conclusion in such a way that, nevertheless, that concluding revelation of love comes as a shock (*Loving Literature: A Cultural History* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015], 185).

42. See Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

43. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*, back cover.

44. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

45. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 5.

46. For Jager, in *Emma*, "things serve as a mark of social ambition and arrival" (*Unquiet Things*, 78). The same could be said of (the literal arrival of) Mary Crawford's harp in *Mansfield Park*—if we add that Mary's harp also carries with it a sense of the threat that social ambition poses to the settled order that Mansfield embodies.

47. Latour takes the term "quasi-object" from Michel Serres. He explains it in *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (1991; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 51–55.

48. Michel Serres, *The Parasite*, trans. Lawrence Schehr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 225.

49. I am indebted to Mark Canuel for this point.

50. Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (New York: Little, Brown, 1976), 55, 52.

51. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 52.

52. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 52, 53.

53. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 53, 75.

54. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 75.

55. This insight is not Bersani's alone. Many critics have treated the production of *Lovers Vows* as the key to understanding both Fanny's character and Austen's moral argument in *Mansfield Park*—in part because the reason for the objection to acting is unclear. See, for example, Lionel Trilling's observation that "it is never made clear why it is so very wrong for young people in a dull country house to put on a play" (*The Opposing Self: Nine Essay in Criticism* [New York: Viking, 1955], 218); and Jonas Barish's remark that "the theatricals come charged with a mysterious iniquity that challenges explanation" (*The Antitheatrical Prejudice* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981], 301). For Trilling, the explanation for the novel's "unequivocal judgment . . . that the enterprise is to be deplored" is that "impersonation leads to the negation of self, thence to the weakening of the social fabric" (*Sincerity and Authenticity* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971], 75).

56. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 80.

57. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 76.

58. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 80.

59. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 77. Fanny's dual role, as exemplar and judge, is captured in David Marshall's observation that, despite her claim that she "cannot act," Fanny plays the role of a spectator and that her perspective is "theatrical." For Marshall, "The crisis of the novel occurs not when Mansfield is turned into a theater but when the Crawfords call into question Fanny's understanding of the roles of player and spectator" (*The Frame of Art: Fictions of Aesthetic Experience, 1750–1815* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005], 75).

60. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 81.

61. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 81. This collaboration of character and author realizes the account of the novel Muriel Spark puts in the mouth of Fleur Talbot, the narrator

of *Loitering with Intent* (see the epigraph to chapter 1). Unlike biographical writing, which is "a very informal party" with "no rules of precedence and hospitality, no invitations," Fleur is impressed by the orderliness of the novel: "It strikes me how much easier it is with characters in a novel than in real life. In a novel the author invents characters and arranges them in convenient order" (*Loitering with Intent* [New York: New Directions, 2001], 59). Like Fanny and Austen, Fleur works in combination with Spark, securing the significance of the events in the novel she inhabits with her judgments. The difference between Fleur and Fanny, however, is that Fleur's judgments are not necessarily moral—just as the "meaningful structure" of Austen's novels is not necessarily the same thing as the structure that makes her characters intelligible.

62. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 81.

63. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 83, 82.

64. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 82.

65. I focus on Bersani because he offers a crucial insight into the formal grounds for accounts of Austen's ideological conservatism and politics such as those advanced by Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*; Daniel Cottom, *The Civilized Imagination: A Study of Ann Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); and Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

66. See William Galperin, "'Describing What Never Happened': Jane Austen and the History of Missed Opportunities," *ELH* 73:2 (2006): 355–82.

67. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 12.

68. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 13, 12.

69. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, 13, 18.

70. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, "Liberalism is the natural ideology of normal change" (*Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms*, 2nd ed. [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001], 17). Thanks here to Jerome Christensen for alerting me to this definition.

71. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*, back cover.

72. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 53.

73. Scott, review of *Emma*, 71.

74. Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 297.

75. Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 297.

76. See, for example, D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and Casey Finch and Peter Bowen, "'The Tittle-Tattle of Highbury': Gossip and Free Indirect Style in *Emma*," *Representations* 31:2 (1990): 1–18. In *The Historical Austen*, Galperin calls Austen's use of free indirect discourse "an especially sinister instrument of coercion" (10).

77. Ferguson, "Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," 162.

78. Ferguson, "Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," 164, 166.

79. Ferguson, "Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," 180.

80. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*, 71.

81. For an account of free indirect style as impossible experience, see Ann Banfield, *Unspeakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

82. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*, 59.

83. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*, 60.

84. Miller, *Jane Austen, or The Secret of Style*, 57.

85. Ferguson, "Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," 157.

86. Ferguson, "Jane Austen, *Emma*, and the Impact of Form," 180.

87. See Marcie Frank's description of how "Miller personifies the virtuoso performance of Austen's free indirect style . . . producing an anthropomorphic conception of writing that yields affectively rich descriptions of the relation between author and text while managing to sidestep the purely biographical" ("Frances Burney's Theatricality," *ELH* 82:2 [2015]: 615–16).

88. Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 13.

89. Thus, when Woloch claims that "understand[ing] the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* as linked together within a common, although asymmetrical structure helps us to understand the complicated relationship between the form of Austen's novel and the emergent social structure that is both a source and end point of this narrative form" (*The One vs. the Many*, 123), we can agree that Austen's handling of her characters says something about "the emergent structure of modern capitalism," but object that we have learned nothing new about the novel form (124).

90. Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, vols. 3–5 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 1:24.

91. Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, 82.

92. Farrer, "Jane Austen, ob. July 18, 1817," quoted in Southam, *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage,* 2:249.

93. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 1.

Chapter 6. De Quincey's Systems

1. Thomas De Quincey refers to the prints as Piranesi's *Dreams*, and, in fact, his description is based not on firsthand experience but his memory of Coleridge's account of the work, which De Quincey describes as the record of "the scenery of his own visions during the delirium of a fever" (*Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Grevel Lindop [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985], 70; subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text).

2. Clifford Siskin, *SYSTEM: The Shaping of Modern Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016). For a concise version of Siskin's argument with respect to the novel, see his earlier essay, "Novels and Systems," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 34:2 (2001): 202–15.

3. Thomas De Quincey, "Style," in *Selected Essays on Rhetoric*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), 231–32. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

4. Washington Irving, "The Mutability of Literature," in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (New York, 1882), 130.

5. De Quincey, "Style," 232.

6. Irving, "Mutability of Literature," 131.

7. Thomas De Quincey, "The English Mail-Coach, or The Glory of Motion," in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings*, 184. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text. On the mail coach as figure and literal vehicle, see Arden Reed, "'Booked for Utter Perplexity' on De Quincey's Mail Coach," in *Thomas De Quincey: Bicentenary Studies*, ed. Robert Lance Snyder (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 281–82.

8. For a reading of De Quincey that complicates the self-divisions that structure his imagination, see John Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

9. John Plotz, for example, claims that "it is not the content of the news, but the mere fact of its distribution that the essay means to celebrate: not the message but the medium" (*The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000], 110); Anne Frey observes that the essay "attributes this national unity . . . not only to the message of victory that the mails carried but also to the system of its dissemination" (*British State Romanticism: Authorship, Agency, and Bureaucratic Nationalism* [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009], 144–45); and Ian Balfour makes Plotz's and Frey's allusions to Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase explicit when he remarks that De Quincey's metonymic abbreviation of "'the mail-coach' as simply 'the mail' identifies the medium with the message, as it were" ("On the Language of the Sublime and the Sublime Nation in De Quincey: Toward a Reading of 'The English Mail-Coach,'" in *Thomas De Quincey: New Theoretical and Critical Directions*, ed. Robert Morrison and Daniel Sanjiv Roberts [New York: Routledge, 2008], 181). For other important readings of "The English Mail-Coach," see Robert Hopkins, "De Quincey on War and the Pastoral Design of 'The English Mail-Coach,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 6 (1967): 129–51; Robert Maniquis, "Lonely Empires: Personal and Public Visions of Thomas De Quincey," in *Literary Monographs*, vol. 8, ed. Eric Rothstein and Joseph Wittreich Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 65–77; V. A. De Luca, *Thomas De Quincey: The Prose of Vision* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 84–116; Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 197–213; Josephine McDonagh, *De Quincey's Disciplines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 66–69; and Frederick Burwick, "Motion and Paralysis in 'The English Mail-Coach,'" *Wordsworth Circle* 26:2 (1995): 66–77.

10. To a large extent, this connection grounds Plotz's, Frey's, and Balfour's divergent readings of the nationalist argument of "The English Mail-Coach."

11. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 24.

12. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

13. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 261, 263.

14. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953), 74.

15. *The Prelude*, in *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 464.

16. Unlike "the crowds attending at a railway station," which "have as little unity as running water, and own as many centres as there are separate carriages in the train," the crowds that greet the mail "had one centre, and acknowledged only one interest" (194–95).

17. "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," in *William Wordsworth*, 132.

18. "The Poetry of Pope," in *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson, 14 vols. (Edinburgh, 1889–90), 11:54. Originally published in 1848 in the *North British Review*, De Quincey's review of William Roscoe's *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esquire* (London, 1847) shares many of the concerns of "Style" and "The English Mail-Coach." The title of the essay is Masson's.

19. "Travelling in England in Old Days," in *Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, 1:270. As with "Poetry of Pope," "Travelling in England in Old Days" is Masson's title.

20. De Quincey, "Travelling in England in Old Days," 270–71.

21. De Quincey, "Travelling in England in Old Days," 271. In *Charles Dickens's Networks: Public Transport and the Novel*, Jonathan H. Grossman notes that the railroad made the "annihilation of space and time" into a "cultural catchphrase" ([Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], 11–12, 202n3), but many writers responded to the mail in precisely the same way, long before the advent of intercity rail lines. In a 1787 letter to Horace Walpole, for example, Hannah More remarked, "I have just been thinking that if the amorous poet, who modestly wished to annihilate time and space had lived to see our fortunate days, he would have seen his prophetic visions realized—cards having well-nigh accomplished the first, and mail-coaches the last" (*Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs. Hannah More*, ed. William Roberts, 4 vols. [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1834], 1:269–70). In *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827), Scott's narrator, Chrystal Croftangry, denounces the mail's leveling effect on men and manners:

> I like mail-coaches, and I hate them. I like them for my convenience, but I detest them for setting the whole world a-gadding, instead of sitting quietly still minding their own business, and preserving the stamp of originality and character which nature or education might have impressed on them. Off they go, jiggling against one another in the rattling vehicle till they have no more variety of stamp in them than so many smooth shillings—the same even in their Welsh wigs and great coats, each without more individuality than belongs to a partner of the company, as the waiter calls them, of the North coach. (*Chronicles of the Canongate*, 2 vols. [Philadelphia, 1827], 1:43)

Croftangry's "smooth shillings" purposefully recall Yorick's "shillings smooth as glass" in Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, ed. Gardner D. Stout Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 232. For an account of novelistic character in terms of this trope, see Deidre Shauna Lynch, *The Economy of Character: Novels, Market Culture, and the Business of Inner Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. 80–119.

22. De Quincey, "Travelling in England in Old Days," 271.

23. De Quincey, "Travelling in England in Old Days," 271.

24. See Frye, *British State Romanticism*, 145–46, 148.

25. The mail is a technology in the sense that in *Keywords* Raymond Williams dates to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rather than "a particular construction or method" or a particular application in a "selected field," the mail retains this earlier sense of technol-

ogy as "a system of such means and methods" (*Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1983], 315).

26. De Quincey, *Confessions*, 73.

27. De Quincey thus reverses the formulation that opens *A Sentimental Journey*.

28. On this kind of reappropriation, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

29. On self-organizing systems in the eighteenth century, see Jonathan Sheehan and Dror Wahrman, *Invisible Hands: Self-Organization and the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), esp. 233–70.

30. For accounts of the gendering of letters in the romantic period, see Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*; and of the relationship between the gendering of the mail and the genesis of modern literature in the nineteenth century, Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, trans. Kevin Repp (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

31. This slow-motion effect recalls De Quincey's description in the *Confessions* of opium's capacity to cause "the vast expansion of time; I sometimes seemed to have lived for 70 or 100 years in one night; nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a millennium passed in that time, or, however, of a duration far beyond the limits of human experience" (68).

32. "Out of the darkness, if I happen to call up the image of Fanny from thirty-five years back," De Quincey writes, "arises suddenly a rose in June," and the images alternate until they "come both as in a chorus; roses and Fannies, Fannies and roses, without end . . ." ("The English Mail-Coach," 198–99).

33. Acts 10:34, King James Version.

34. De Quincey, *Confessions*, 64.

35. De Quincey, *Confessions*, 65.

36. De Quincey, *Confessions*, 65–66.

37. *The Logic of Political Economy* (1844), in *Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, 9:119. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

38. De Quincey, *Confessions*, 71.

39. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852; New York: International, 1963), 15.

40. The phrase is Carlyle's, from his "Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question," *Fraser's Magazine* 40 (December 1849), 670–79.

41. "System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes" (1846), in *Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, 8:7n1. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

42. Immanuel Kant, "The Question, Whether the Earth Is Ageing, Considered from a Physical Point of View" (1754), in *Kant: Natural Science*, ed. Eric Watkins, trans. Olaf Reinhardt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 168.

43. De Quincey, "Travelling in England in Old Days," 232.

44. For a reading of the discourse of the sublime in "System of the Heavens" that emphasizes the relationship between consciousness and language, see Robert Platzner, "'Persecutions of the Infinite': De Quincey's 'System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes' as an Inquiry into the Sublime," in *Sensibility in Transformation: Creative Resistance to Sentiment from the Augustans to the Romantics; Essays in Honor of Jean H. Hagstrum*,

ed. Syndy McMillen Conger (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 195–207.

45. De Quincey, "System of the Heavens," 18n1; Grevel Lindop, *The Opium-Eater: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (London: Dent, 1981), 10.

46. See, for example, Jonathan Smith, "De Quincey's Revisions to 'The System of the Heavens,'" *Victorian Periodicals Review* 26:4 (1993): 203–12.

47. Immanuel Kant, "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" (1786), in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 238. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

48. Anna Henchman has recently traced the influence of "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" and *Theory of the Heavens* on "System of the Heavens." For De Quincey, she argues, "astronomical observation has disrupted the categories of subjectivity and objectivity by revealing that there is no fixed point in the entire universe" (*The Starry Sky Within: Astronomy and the Reach of the Mind in Victorian Literature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 68). Describing the ebb and flow of De Quincey's estimation of Kant, she charts a trajectory that reproduces his shifting assessments of political economy: at first enthusiastic about *The Critique of Pure Reason*, De Quincey becomes disturbed by its "emphasis on the subjective nature of external reality"; finally, prompted by Coleridge, he returns to Kant's critical philosophy—in particular the "idea that orientation and direction are necessary parts of thinking" (69). Henchman shows how De Quincey's "rapid shifts in point of view, scale and even genre" reflect his response to the "universe in flux" revealed by Lord Rosse's telescope (72), an uncertainty he worked to assuage by turning to Kant's radical recasting of the relationship between subjective and objective observation. What is perhaps most striking about her account, however, is the underlying sense that Kantian orientation in fact intensifies the instabilities that De Quincey sought to alleviate.

49. For a reading of the relationship between Memnon's head and "System of the Heavens," see Barrell, *Infection of Thomas De Quincey*, 104–25.

50. De Quincey does something similar in "The English Mail-Coach" when he observes that changing horses "about Waterloo" took "four hundred seconds" (196). The calculation is not difficult, but measuring time in seconds when minutes would be more natural is an obstacle to easy comprehension.

51. Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5. See also her "Deep Time: American Literature and World History," *American Literary History* 13:4 (2001): 755–75.

52. Mark McGurl, "The Posthuman Comedy," *Critical Inquiry* 38:3 (2012): 541.

53. McGurl, "Posthuman Comedy," 538.

54. McGurl, "Posthuman Comedy," 541.

55. McGurl, "Posthuman Comedy," 539.

56. Henchman observes that this eighteenth-century man must be De Quincey's invention, noting, among other reasons, that "the post-office clocks he supposedly referred to were a nineteenth-century innovation" (*Starry Sky Within*, 245n15).

57. Siskin, "Novels and Systems," 206.

58. J. Hillis Miller, *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 52.

59. Miller, *Disappearance of God*, 52.

60. Miller, *Disappearance of God*, 52.

61. "Sir William Hamilton," in *Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, 5:350.

62. De Quincey, "Sir William Hamilton," 5:350.

63. Miller, *Disappearance of God*, 56. The quotation is from "Poetry of Pope," 93.

Coda

1. Thomas De Quincey, "System of the Heavens as Revealed by Lord Rosse's Telescopes," in *The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. David Masson, 14 vols. (Edinburgh, 1889–90), 8:15.

2. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 147.

3. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 147.

4. Foucault, *Order of Things*, 148, 149.

5. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. J. Paul Hunter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 22, 32. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

6. Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Gardner D. Stout Jr. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 171.

7. Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms* (New York: Verso, 1983), 85.

8. Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 108.

9. Zoe Beenstock, "Lyrical Sociability: The Social Contract and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *Philosophy and Literature* 39:2 (2015): 407; Daniel Stout, *Corporate Romanticism: Liberalism, Justice, and the Novel* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 177.

10. Ironically, Victor denies his own family the happiness that he envisions for his creations. He does not visit Geneva for two years while busy with his work in Ingolstadt, and he fails even to write his family during his long recovery from the illness that afflicts him after he brings the creature to life. In a letter from home delivered by his childhood friend and surrogate brother, Henry Clerval, Elizabeth Lavenza, his cousin and future wife, urges him to confirm that he is "getting better," "for indeed, Victor, we are all very miserable on this account. Relieve us from this fear, and we shall be the happiest creatures in the world" (39). On this point, see Ferguson's observation that "even though Victor's own family appears to represent bourgeois domesticity in its most thoroughly accomplished form, it was from the start monstrous, as Victor's nearly obsessive desire to be away from home registers" (*Solitude and the Sublime*, 108).

11. As Ferguson points out, the monster's murderous itinerary—he kills William, which leads to Justine Moritz's execution, and then murders Clerval and Elizabeth—highlights the artificial and constructed character of the Frankenstein family, "almost as if the monster attacked these figures in particular because he imagined Victor's repudiation of him as an argument that the family unity could only be stretched among so many persons—and because he imagined, further, that the existence of those persons made it impossible for Victor to expand his notion of the family enough to include him" (*Solitude and the Sublime*, 109).

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